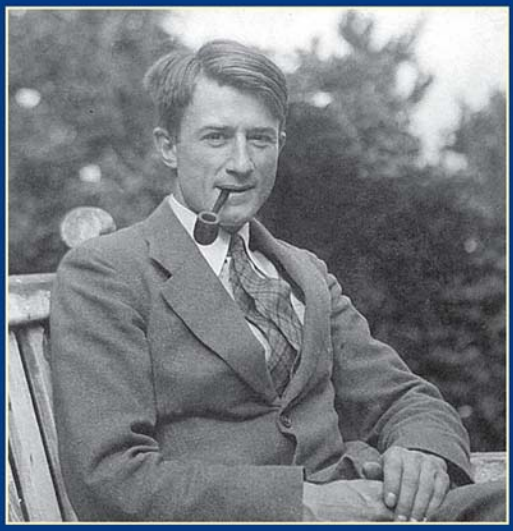
Michael Oakeshott



Early Political Writings 1925-1930

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EARLY POLITICAL WRITINGS 1925–30

Michael Oakeshott

Edited by Luke O'Sullivan

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Preface

The fifth volume in the *Selected Writings* series returns to the Oakeshott archive at the British Library of Political and Economic Science (BLPES). Unlike the third and fourth volumes, which anthologised Oakeshott's widely scattered previously published essays and reviews, it consists entirely of previously unpublished work. It is also the first volume to concentrate exclusively on the first decade of his early career.

Specifically, it makes widely available for the first time a Fellowship dissertation from 1925, as well as the first version of a series of lectures Oakeshott gave between 1928 and 1930. The 1925 ms has been circulating informally for some years, and is strikingly different in style and content to anything he wrote later on. Yet it is an important work, because it was his first attempt at a systematic presentation of his ideas, and was more explicit about his sources than anything else he ever wrote.

Moreover, when the 1925 ms is placed together with the lectures which represent the state of Oakeshott's thought in the later 1920s and early 1930s, they allow us to understand more clearly than ever before the development of his ideas in this crucial and still under-explored first phase of his intellectual career. The lectures in particular, as the introduction will make clear, form an important bridge towards *Experience and its Modes*.

As is now customary, I am very happy to thank Imprint Academic, publishers of the *Selected Writings*, for their support. This was the first volume of the *Selected Writings* to be prepared almost entirely at the Political Science Department of the National University of Singapore, and I would like to acknowledge the generous funding which made possible a visit to the British Library and the London School of Economics in June and July of 2010 in order to finish off the research. I would also like to record my gratitude to Professor Terry Nardin for his comments on a draft of the editorial introduction.

The greater part of the work of turning typescript and manuscript into electronic text fell once more upon my wife Olga, but as usual, responsibility for the errors the volume doubtless contains rests entirely with the editor.

Singapore, 2010

Editorial Introduction

I: The Early Oakeshott and Political Philosophy

Michael Oakeshott (1901–90) made his reputation as a political philosopher, but for a long time students of his work assumed that he had little interest in politics before 1945. His major pre-war work, *Experience and its Modes* (1933), an examination of the nature of philosophy and its relation to other forms of thought, made almost no mention of the subject.[1] However, it has become increasingly clear that this initial judgment was misleading. A posthumous collection of early essays, *Religion, Politics, and the Moral Life* (1993), proved that political philosophy was a lifelong concern.[2] Nevertheless, the belief that Oakeshott was relatively uninterested in politics, at least in the 1920s, has persisted.[3]

This volume dispels this notion for good. It contains two previously unpublished works, a manuscript entitled 'A Discussion of Some Matters Preliminary to the Study of Political Philosophy' (the 1925 ms), and a course of undergraduate lectures on 'The Philosophical Approach to Politics' written between 1928 and 1930 (the 1930 lectures).[4] Their titles alone establish that politics was a central concern in the first decade of Oakeshott's intellectual career. Indeed, this introduction will show beyond any doubt that the ideas of *Experience and its Modes* actually *grew out of* Oakeshott's prior philosophical interest in politics.

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[1] M. Oakeshott, *Experience and its Modes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991 [1933]), p. 316, identified politics as a form of practical experience but offered no extended discussion.

[2] M. Oakeshott, *Religion, Politics, and the Moral Life*, ed. T. Fuller (Yale: Yale University Press, 1993).

[3] See S. Soininen, *From a 'Necessary Evil' to the Art of Contingency: Michael Oakeshott's Conception of Political Activity* (Exeter: Imprint Academic 2005), p. 3.

[4] See LSE 1/1/3 and 1/1/7, respectively.

Moreover, the position Oakeshott had reached by 1930 explains why politics was virtually absent from *Experience and its Modes*. He concluded that political philosophy could never be true philosophy because of the inherently unsatisfactory nature of political activity itself. Thus, there was little point including politics in a work designed to present a model of authentic philosophy. Incidentally, this conclusion also explains the roots of the negative view of politics that he held between the wars, something often remarked upon but never satisfactorily explained.

Together, the 1925 ms and the 1930 lectures transform our knowledge of the first decade of Oakeshott's intellectual development, bringing his mental horizons into sharp focus, allowing us to reconstruct the context of his early thought, and making the similarities and differences with his later work clearer than ever before. For instance, the nature and extent of his early commitment to philosophical Idealism can be more precisely evaluated, and also be shown decisively to be absent from his later work.

There are undeniably important continuities, as well as differences, between the early and the mature Oakeshott. He carried on asking many of the same questions throughout his career, but his approach to answering them changed radically, and even if he sometimes reached the same conclusions, his reasons for holding them were different. Hindsight makes clear that he moved towards an increasingly sceptical and minimalistic approach to political philosophy, and that he did so largely by way of self-criticism, gradually jettisoning more and more of his own early Idealist and Rationalist beliefs.

II: A Discussion of Some Matters Preliminary to the Study of Political Philosophy

The 1925 ms may have been written as part of Oakeshott's successful Fellowship application to Gonville and Cauis College.[5] Notably dissatisfied with contemporary political philosophy, it enlarges on the theme of a previous essay, 'The Cambridge School of Political Science' (1924), which complained that the Cambridge syllabus of political science 'entirely misses "the real thing"' because it 'occupies itself almost exclusively with the passing forms of government'. Consequently, political science as studied at Cambridge lacked a definition of politics. Worse still, one 'never arrives' at the true subject of political science, the study of the State.[6]

An important argument developed in the 1925 ms, about which Oakeshott never changed his mind, is that political thought is not all of the same kind. He owed this view at least partly to Bosanquet's *History of Aesthetic*, in which works of art were classified into 'three main heads. First, the works of art themselves … secondly … all writing about art the aim of which is either to improve it, give directions for the creation of works of art, or to describe individual productions; [and] thirdly, aesthetic theory, the aim of which is neither to describe, to improve or to direct, but simply to theorize'.[7]

Proposing that we can 'approach other human experiences in the same way,' Oakeshott concluded that the 'vast literature of utopias and practical suggestions in government' required separating from the 'genuine literature of political philosophy'. Many problems in political philosophy, he believed, stemmed from a failure to observe the differences between 'a serious theoretical treatment [of political

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[5] It seems likely that the shorter 'Essay on the Relations of Philosophy, Poetry, and Reality' was actually written for the MA rather than the Fellowship as stated in the Introduction to *What is History? and other essays. Selected Writings Vol. 1* (*SW*), ed. L. O'Sullivan.

[6] M. Oakeshott, 'The Cambridge School of Political Science': see *SW*, i. 56.

[7] p. 131.

thought and] the wildest scheme for the reform of the Franchise'.[8] While canonical works like Plato's *Republic* or Rousseau's *Contrat Social* admittedly had a dual character as 'at once works of criticism and of theory', Oakeshott interpreted their authors as deliberately employing more than one genre without confusing them.[9] In contrast, modern writers like Laski and Hobhouse failed to appreciate the distinction.

The 1925 ms was concerned with far more than questions of genre, however. Despite its self-proclaimed status as a propadeutic, it adopted an ambitious Idealistic and Rationalistic metaphysics. First, definition was argued to be the necessary culmination of all rational intellectual activity. Next, it proceeded to define politics, philosophy, the State, and the Self, or individual. Finally, it concluded (in the best traditions of Hegelian and British Idealism) that the State and the Self are mutually implicatory concepts united by the notion of a rational, general, will.

Plato, Aristotle, Spinoza, Rousseau, Hegel, Bosanquet, and Bradley are all deployed in support of this position, though Bosanquet's presence perhaps looms largest. But the manuscript really only makes sense when read as a contribution to the debate then occurring in England between the British Idealists, who defended state sovereignty as the necessary outcome of a metaphysics of the rational will, on the one hand, and the so-called 'pluralists', on the other, who attacked sovereignty and its associated philosophy as a danger both to individual liberty and to associational freedom at large.

The pluralist theory of group personality (which the legal historian F.W. Maitland argued had received a kind of *de facto* recognition in English history under the law of trusts) seemed to offer a means of preserving the independence of non-state groups such as churches and trade unions against governmental interference.[10] If groups

[8] p. 69.

[9] p. 133.

[10] F.W. Maitland, 'Trust and Corporation', in *Group Rights Perspectives Since 1900*, ed. J. Stapleton (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1995), pp. 1–37.

had personality, they also had rights against the state. The appeal of such reasoning cut across 'left' and 'right'. While leading historians and political theorists including not only Maitland but J.N. Figgis, Ernest Barker, Harold Laski, and G.D.H. Cole, all found pluralist ideas attractive, they were by no means led to the same political conclusions. Figgis, for example, inclined toward syndicalism, Barker espoused a patriotic liberalism of a Whiggish sort, Cole favoured guild socialism, and Laski increasingly leaned towards Marxism.

The Idealist-pluralist debate was not, however, an outright clash. British Idealists often saw the state as an association that was only first amongst equals. Oakeshott in particular, though professedly hostile to Laski, was a lifelong admirer of Maitland, and had considerable sympathy for Barker, whose own political philosophy was also a fusion of Idealism and pluralism. Like most Idealists, Oakeshott regarded a varied associational life as a condition of metaphysical unity, and so was actually in tune with a major theme of pluralist thought.

Moreover, pluralists and Idealists shared a common enemy; both disliked legal positivism and the command theory of law, which they found exemplified in the writings of John Austin (and Hobbes). Admittedly, they disliked it for different reasons; Oakeshott because it involved too restrictive a conception of the state as simply the legal government of the day, Laski because it treated state sovereignty as indivisible.

Nevertheless, there was sometimes less difference between them than Oakeshott would have cared to admit. Certainly, he criticized Laski's view in *Foundations of Sovereignty* that government was the 'primary organ' of the state as too narrow, because the state was synonymous with society as a whole whereas 'government, rules or laws do not comprise the whole [of society]'.[11] All the same, he shared Laski's dislike of excessively interventionist authority.

This edited collection and its editorial introduction is indispensable for the study of English political ideas in the early twentieth century.

[11] p. 117.

This affinity between apparent opponents is unsurprising given that the socialist tradition which inspired Laski and Cole owed a great deal to Rousseau and Hegel, thinkers who were also major sources for British Idealism. Indeed, British Idealism itself was a continuation of the fusion of utilitarian, liberal, and socialist themes developed by Bentham and J.S. Mill, just with a more elaborate metaphysic bolted on. T.H. Green was probably the most sympathetic of the British Idealists towards socialism, but Bosanquet could still write that 'Socialism, at its best [challenges] the preconception that poverty must be recognized as a permanent class-function'.[12] Nor should we forget that Oakeshott himself had grown up with a Fabian family background which fostered in him an early sympathy for socialism.

Furthermore, both Idealism and pluralism shared some anti-democratic sentiments, insofar as 'democracy' was synonymous with laissez-faire individualism. In both Europe and the USA, the outbreak of war in 1914 was widely regarded as the final failure of this type of democracy. In Germany, Carl Schmitt hailed the English pluralist critique of sovereignty and declared that parliamentary democracy was in crisis; in England, both Barker and Laski declared that the state was discredited, or at least relegated from its former position of pre-eminence.[13] Once more, the meanings attached to this judgment varied widely. For Schmitt and Laski it provided a justification for radical political experiments in national socialism and communism, respectively; for Barker it was a positive development, insofar as too much emphasis on the state was not, from a pluralist perspective, a healthy thing.

Oakeshott actually held a similar position. At least, he conceived of 'the State' as something above and beyond the ordinary business

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[12] B. Bosanquet, *The Philosophical Theory of the State*, 2nd edn (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd, 1910), p. 318.

[13] C. Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1996 [1932]), pp. 39–42; E. Barker, 'The Discredited State', in *Group Rights*, ed. Stapleton, pp. 76–93; H. Laski, *Studies in the Problem of Sovereignty* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1968 [1917]), p. 14.

of contemporary government and politics, about which he shared Barker's disillusionment. Discussing sociological theories of law in the 1925 ms, he declared that the views of Duguit (a colleague of Durkheim's) were representative of a 'new movement' which might 'succeed … in saying to government …"Give place", and … will allow the true "State" to take its rightful place as sovereign.'[14] Oakeshott thus shared the hope, which informed both left and right in the early 1920s, that a radical improvement in European politics was imminent. Ultimately, however, pluralism and Idealism failed to generate practical political alternatives to liberal democracy, and their anti-democratic sentiments ensured that after 1945 they were rejected along with National Socialism, fascism, and communism. Idealism was universally condemned as a form of German statism (always a common pluralist criticism); pluralism seemed odious because of the similarity between its emphasis on the real personality of the group and the völkish delusions of the National Socialists. The violent reaction to nineteenth-century ideas which the political thought of the inter-war years represented became subject in turn to an equally violent reaction, and the post-1945 welfare state became an unquestionable political norm. The inter-war era was forgotten for a generation, until historians of political thought began rediscovering it in the later twentieth century.

In keeping with this general trend, Oakeshott's post-war approach to political theorising changed profoundly after 1945. He concentrated on an essayistic approach that largely eschewed explicit talk of metaphysical first principles. The writings collected as *Rationalism in Politics* (1962) that brought him to public attention made no mention of definition and classification, or the basis of the philosophy of the state in a metaphysics of the rational will. Without some notion of this inter-war context, then, his early efforts can seem strange indeed when placed alongside his published works.

But in the 1920s, Oakeshott was convinced of the essential correctness of Idealism. The 1925 ms was prefixed with a quotation

[14] p. 125.

from Plato's *Phaedrus* emphasizing the necessity of correct definition. The declaration that definition was the basis of all 'systematic thought' was not merely rationalism; it was Rationalism of exactly the sort that he would later criticize in his own works.[15] His language bespoke the vast ambition of Idealist monism; 'to see the whole of any one thing … is at once to have achieved a theory of the universe'.

In the pursuit of definition, Oakeshott argued, we necessarily realise that our object is only 'a part or a mode (that is, a modification) of something larger and more generic. In seeking significance the mind always advances from the part to the whole, from the merely actual to the real'.[16] We may note both the specific influence of Spinoza's *Ethics* in the reference to modality, and the general impact of Idealism, which in both its ancient and modern forms relies on a distinction between appearance and reality.

F.H. Bradley's famous work of Idealist metaphysics, *Appearance and Reality* (1893), reflected this distinction in its title, as, indeed, did *Experience and its Modes*. There, Oakeshott insisted that the various modes were less actual than the fully real experience that only philosophy could offer. Yet even in his earliest writings he acknowledged a plurality of forms of thinking which laid claim to truth.[17] How, then, was philosophy supposed to be superior to the various other possible approaches to truth? The solution suggested in 1925 was that the best definition or classification is 'that which tells us most about the thing or experience'.

This raised at least two major problems. First, unless we assume that the information our preferred classification contains is somehow self-validating, the fact that it yields more information says nothing about its veracity. It may just contain more abundant error. Second, Oakeshott's distinction between 'the essential qualities, purposes and conditions of a thing', and 'those qualities, purposes and conditions

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[15] p. 46.

[16] pp. 46–7.

[17] See 'History is a Fable' (1923) and 'An Essay on the Relations of Philosophy, Poetry, and Reality' (1925), *SW*, i. 31–44, 67–115.

that are merely contingent' was inextricably dependent on the perspective of the agent. For instance, 'a classification of pictures by their date or painter' would be 'better than one according to their weight'. But by his own admission, 'a transport office would do well to adhere' to a classification of paintings by weight. Thus, the status of the painting as such is from this point of view a contingent rather than an essential feature of it. There is no independent position from which the priority of the identity of the painting *as* a painting can be asserted.

Indeed, Oakeshott's account of definition showed little awareness of contemporary philosophical thought on the subject. He distinguished several possible uses of the word 'is' to signify identity, predication, and existence in a way that indicates a passing familiarity with the discussions then going on at Cambridge in the philosophy of logic and mathematics, but there was no engagement with the work of thinkers such as Frege or Russell. All he really wanted to do was uphold Hegel's insistence that 'a definition should have only universal features' and the Aristotelian claim that a 'judgment of purpose underlies all our judgements as to the value in a definition of the true nature' of a thing.[18]

Thus, the question 'what is political philosophy' was to be answered by seeking a definition that would 'be true … not only now, but at all times'.[19] The thought of different historical periods was to be judged according to the degree to which it had successfully approximated a timeless ideal of politics. But what was the purpose of politics? The answer given in the 1925 ms followed the arguments of Bosanquet's *Philosophical Theory of the State* particularly closely.

After examining Rousseau's notion of the General Will and Kant's and Hegel's uses of it, Bosanquet had argued that the nation-state was 'the widest organization which has the common experience necessary to found a common life', and that as such it represented an 'ethical idea' in the form of a 'faith or a purpose'.[20] Oakeshott

[18] pp. 54–5.

[19] p. 81.

[20] Bosanquet, *Theory of the State*, pp. 320–1.

took up these views, insisting that 'will, and not force or anything else, expresses the real nature of political life'.[21] To support the claim that the realisation of statehood in a given society depends on the development of a common will, he contrasted philosophical and historical ways of thinking.

The 1925 ms contrasted history unfavourably with the philosophical search for 'logical order'. Philosophy eschewed the genetic approach allegedly common to the historical, social, and physical sciences in favour of 'a theory of the whole'. Even in *On History* (1983), Oakeshott would probably have agreed with his earlier claim that 'History postulates that at some time and in some place certain events happened, and then endeavours to discover how these events took place.' What he would not have agreed with was that this was a flaw rather than simply a characteristic of historical understanding.

Oakeshott always regarded philosophy as a distinctive form of thought. But while he later ceased to hold that all other studies simply 'present [philosophy] with nothing but the raw material of true facts, and so themselves depend, in the fullest sense, upon philosophy', the 1925 ms persistently conflated the two positions. The idea of philosophical definition as the 'exploration of [the] elementary considerations which underlie all thought'[22]—a conception of philosophy that he never renounced—was merged with the idea that other activities were not fully satisfactory until philosophy had validated them. 'The existence of political life brings with it certain assumptions...and until these are examined we cannot come at its meaning'.[23]

The claim that 'Some conceptions of property will be found quite untenable because...they are discovered to deny themselves' did not mean, however, that such conceptions would be overthrown in practice. Even in his early work Oakeshott had no sympathy for Marx's thesis that the purpose of philosophy is to change the world;

[21] p. 58.
[22] pp. 39–40.
[23] p. 65.

he was quite explicit that 'the philosopher never desires to change things, but to understand them'.[24] The State Oakeshott wanted to construct was a purely logical entity.

Such lack of interest in practical questions actually made Oakeshott rather unusual. The majority view at the time was that political philosophy and social science were of interest only as tools of social reform.[25] Utilitarians like Sidgwick and Idealists like Bosanquet disagreed profoundly over philosophical questions, but they shared a conviction that improving the lot of the poor was both necessary and desirable. In social science, a thinker like Graham Wallas, who was interested in developing a psychology that could 'forecast, and therefore … influence, the conduct of large numbers of human beings organized in societies', would probably not have been terribly perturbed to be told by Oakeshott that his project could never provide 'a philosophy of political life'.[26]

Like Socrates, however, Oakeshott did not much care whether or not *kallipolis* represented a practical possibility. This Platonism extended to method; in an apparently deliberate imitation of the *Republic*, he remarked that the state could be approached as a whole, or via the individual selves from which the whole was constructed.[27] And like the *Republic*, the 1925 ms dealt first with the state from the point of view of society, defined as 'an association of minds'. The individual in such an association will find that 'his society has undertaken to educate him, whether or not he likes it'. The early Oakeshott assumed that this education (reminiscent of a Rousseauian process in which we are to be 'forced to be free') would be benign.

This view of the State (with a capital 'S') as 'a self-governing community whose purpose embraces a way of life' and as resting

[24] p. 68.

[25] R. Soffer, *Ethics and Society in England: The Revolution in the Social Sciences 1870–1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), offers a comprehensive account of the connection between social science and reform.

[26] p. 63.

[27] Plato, *Republic*, 368e.

on 'a solidarity of feeling, opinion, and belief' established it as a very broad category, in contrast to 'government'. In part, Oakeshott was again following Bosanquet. The State was not merely a Hobbesian answer to the need for order. Rather, it 'exists because we need, in order to be ourselves, some unified whole which is... morally self-sufficing'. But there is also a clear Aristotelian influence in Oakeshott's declaration, practically a paraphrase of the *Politics*, that 'Every important movement in human history comes into being for the sake of life, but exists for the sake of a more abundant life'.[28] Finally, this classicism was filtered through Rousseauianism, and also through Hegelian Idealism. The metaphysical unity of the individual with the general will is one of the guiding ideas of the *Contrat Social*, and Oakeshott cited with approval Hegel's remark that 'The State...is the individual's substance'.[29]

Multiple sources thus produced in Oakeshott the conviction that the state was the highest vehicle of human ethical purpose. On this basis he was prepared to state that 'in times of crisis … the degree of statehood possessed by an association will be abnormally great', so that 'England in August 1914 was more of a state than she was during the great industrial strikes of 1911–12'.[30] After experiencing a second war, he still saw in it a force for unity, but not a positive one; war, he came to think, was inimical to civil freedom. The unity it produced was the unity of an 'enterprise association' in which individuals were subordinate to the goal of the group; in this case, victory.

The discussion of the State concludes with a list of definitions that has no real parallel in Oakeshott's published writings, which almost went out of their way to avoid making specific reference to other writers. But this list reveals exactly who he had been reading. It is sorted into different classes, the majority of which failed to meet his criterion of philosophical adequacy. The most common confusion was mixing up a 'scientific' approach that addressed

[28] p. 76.
[29] p. 111.
[30] p. 80.

'questions of origin and development' with a philosophical 'treatment of the whole and real nature' of the state.[31] Writers either mistook a 'particular manifestation' or 'activity' such as territory or government for the 'real and essential quality of statehood', or took an empirical account of the origin of the state for a philosophical definition.

Of the thirteen examples of correct definition, seven were drawn from either Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* or Bosanquet's *Philosophical Theory of the State*. Burke's remark that the state 'is a partnership in all science, in all art, in every virtue, in all perfection' is also an understandable enough inclusion, given Oakeshott's conviction that the state was a comprehensive unity. The other more obscure writers, like Mary Follett, an American now mainly remembered as an early theorist of business management, and William Inge, Dean of St Pauls' Cathedral, were selected because they shared the contemporary hostility to existing forms of democracy and endorsed the creation of new forms of associational life (indicating once more the closeness of Oakeshott's Idealism to the pluralism of the day).

This discussion of 'the State', as we observed, was followed by 'the Self'. For the mature Oakeshott of *On Human Conduct* (1975), relationships with others were a condition of selfhood, and citizenship was one such possible relationship. There is a real continuity here with his early work, which also argued that it is impossible to be a self out of all relation to others. The 1925 ms was insistent that, just as the state could not be reduced to territory or force, so the self resisted metaphysical reduction to the body, however inevitable such an identification for practical (legal) purposes.[32]

Nor was the self equivalent to 'a kind of constant average mass of experiences', a Humean bundle of sensations.[33] Oakeshott was not tempted by any variety of scepticism which called the reality of the self into question; quoting *Appearance and Reality*, he declared

[31] pp. 86–7.
[32] p. 97.
[33] p. 98.

that its existence was self-evident. The problem was the criterion by which to identify it. For ordinary understanding, a thing was 'that which seems to stand out from its environment with a certain observable degree of self-subsistence and self-containedness'. But the distinction between a thing and its environment often turned out to be far from absolute. Just as we cannot absolutely separate a plant dependent upon soil and air from its environment, the self 'is largely, if not entirely, social'.[34]

Such examples illustrated the more general truth that 'to suppose a "thing" entirely out of relation is to suppose nothing'. In Oakeshott's Idealist logic, which seems to owe something to the work of R.L. Nettleship as well as to Bosanquet, some important consequences followed from this position. Since knowing a thing fully involved a knowledge of its relationships, and since any given thing, *x*, must stand in some relation to everything else (all that is not-*x*), then fully to know the nature of *x* entailed fully knowing the nature of the universe as a whole. This view reinforced the Idealist conviction of a gap between sensible appearances and ultimate reality. The plant may look as if it is an entirely discrete object, but this appearance is deceptive; it is only a part of a larger whole. The self cannot be treated in exactly the same way as the plant is, for the self is both conscious and immaterial, but both are embedded in a network of relationships.

The self was therefore 'largely, if not entirely, social', and the division between 'self' and 'others' ultimately apparent rather than real.[35] Selfhood comes into being through an active and conscious process of co-ordination with an environment that includes other people. In technical terms, it involved 'making new experiences logically coherent with the present body of experience'. This idea that experience involves the construction of a coherent 'world' was central to *Experience and its Modes*, but we find it already articulated in the 1925 ms.

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[34] pp. 99–101.

[35] p. 100.

This theory of the self as active cognition was also intended to highlight its allegedly universal form. The ultimate outcome of all intellectual activity, we noted, was supposed to be a definition of some kind, and it was crucial for Oakeshott that in this respect the intellect was similar to the will, for 'the true object of the will is always universal'. In keeping with Platonic metaphysics which regarded the true and the good as two aspects of the same ideal Form, Oakeshott found little difference between cognition and volition. Both involved 'the whole self directed towards a universal object'. But if one had to identify one of these acts as more fundamental than the other, Oakeshott declared one would have to choose volition. Knowledge presupposed will, so that 'at least some form of willing seems to lie behind every act of knowing'.[36]

Oakeshott's early thought thus also contained an element of compromise between Idealist rationalism and pragmatism. In philosophy, he was a thoroughgoing Rationalist; but he was also convinced that the world of thought depended on the world of action. This was, however, a practical rather than a logical dependence; without actors, there could be no scientific or philosophical or artistic activity, but action was not prior in the sense of being more important than intellectual or cultural activity. Indeed, the reverse was the case; like many Idealists, he was thoroughly prejudiced in favour of the contemplative life. Moreover, like Plato, he was convinced that earthly reality should approximate the world of Ideas. If the idea of the individual Self necessarily pointed towards its union with other Selves in the State, this union was still only a pale reflection of the idea of the unity of the universe as a whole. 'The only true, because the only perfect, self is the universe; for the universe alone achieves that unity of experience which is the essence of statehood'.[37]

This attribution of selfhood to the universe as a whole, and the claim that the universe is capable of a unity of experience, would strike most contemporary philosophers—if indeed they

[36] p. 105.
[37] p. 107.

accepted such statements as meaningful at all—as quasi-religious in nature, and it is worth remarking that in this period Oakeshott was a believing Christian. His Christianity was, admittedly, highly modernistic and anti-dogmatic; but it was nonetheless a significant factor in his thought. It is also virtually absent from the two works published here, though it is clearly visible in other essays that he published in the 1920s. This only underlines the importance of taking a comprehensive view of a philosopher's writings if one wishes to understand the full range of their ideas.[38]

Oakeshott's metaphysical account of the Self entailed that the individual could only achieve an identity 'through his particular station and the faithful performance of its particular duties'. In saying this, of course, he was following Bradley's *Ethical Studies*. Through acquiring an identity in the obligatory performance of various social roles one came into contact with the State and with humanity as a whole. Neither could be encountered directly; 'The riches of the wider whole can reach us only through the (apparently) more limited loyalty'.[39]

The conclusion of the discussion of selfhood, then, was the mutual identity of State and Self, from which it allegedly followed that the State could do no wrong as it was in fact only the real will of the individual. In fact, this argument that the 'real State...is liable to error only when it deserts its "statehood"' was supposed to *restrict* the types of activity the state could properly engage in rather than make it omnicompetent. Here again Oakeshott was following Bosanquet; but faced with actual states ruled by dictators claiming de facto infallibility, there would soon be little public sympathy for the metaphysical subtleties differentiating benign from destructive versions of the philosophy that 'The self is the State; the State is the self'.

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[38] See 'Religion and the Moral Life' (1927); 'The Importance of the Historical Element in Christianity' (1928); and 'Religion and the World' (1929), all republished in *Religion, Politics, and the Moral Life*.

[39] p. 112.

For all that Oakeshott protested that Spencer's opposition of '"Man versus the State" is sheer nonsense',[40] he could only dismiss conflicts between state and individual as illusory, and reduce all political conflict to logical error, so long as he retained the metaphysical contrast between appearance and reality. Only thus could any divergence between the will of the individual and the universal will be explained as a result of 'isolation and ignorance', in keeping with Rousseauian and Hegelian tradition.[41] But in 1925 the problem of reliably ascertaining the universal will, never mind the even more fundamental issue of whether the concept of such a will made sense at all, was never really faced.

Oakeshott concluded by reiterating his desire to defend the specifically philosophical treatment of politics. The new social sciences of psychology, sociology, and anthropology threatened the autonomy of political philosophy, but the fundamental ideas of political life like 'the State' needed to be analysed as concepts as well as set in their social context. Yet he was not wedded to his own opinions. Given his subsequent intellectual development we should take him at his word when he wrote that 'I am ready to abandon many of the conclusions here reached, but not the attitude … of doubt'. He always remained true to this early sceptical conviction, which in the end was at odds with his commitment to the dogmas of Rationalism concerning definition and those of Idealism regarding the distinction between Appearance and Reality, that the aim of philosophy was to identify 'presuppositions' and turn them into 'examined preconceptions'. He had also sown the seeds of a lifelong interest in the philosophy of education with his declaration that 'the problem of government is a single manifestation of a much wider problem—the problem of education'.[42]

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[40] p. 110.

[41] p. 113.

[42] p. 131. On Oakeshott's philosophy of education see K. Williams, *Education and the Voice of Michael Oakeshott* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2007).

There are thus some important similarities between the 1925 ms and *On Human Conduct*. The first section of *On Human Conduct*, 'On the Theoretical Understanding of Human Conduct', can be seen as the counterpart of the discussion in the 1925 ms of 'the Self'. Though Oakeshott had long ago abandoned the idea of the universe as a self, this section can still be seen as fulfilling the demand for what the 1925 ms described as a 'metaphysical prolegomenon'. In a sense, therefore, he retained the belief that 'all political philosophy depends upon a view of the universe', while becoming much more sceptical and minimalistic in his notion of what such a view entailed.[43] Similarly, the second section, on 'the civil condition', can be read as addressing what the 1925 ms had called 'the State'. But here the parallel between the structure of the two works ends, because *On Human Conduct* included a third section absent from the 1925 ms, in which the history of political ideas was made a separate subject of analysis.

III: The Philosophical Approach to Politics

The lectures on 'The Philosophical Approach to Politics' were Oakeshott's first as a university lecturer at Cambridge. They were read twice, first in the Lent term of 1928–9, and again in 1929–30. The LSE archive contains two complete versions, one written out in full (set A), the other in note form (set B). It is possible to date the composition of set A from both circumstantial and internal evidence to early 1928. On the balance of probabilities, it seems most likely that the full scripts of set A were written first and that the version in note form contained in set B is a later revision.[44]

[43] p. 135.

[44] Set A was written entirely on the backs of printed covering pages for examination answer books. One of these has been dated by a candidate 'December 1927', a few months before the lectures are known to have first been given. It thus seems very unlikely that set B, written entirely on plain paper, would have been composed in note form before this date. Set A also appears to make reference to a letter published in The Times in early 1928.

Since, however, Sets A and B were unquestionably prepared within a year or so of one another, and are very close to one another in content, the chronology is not vital. Both sets consist of eight lectures and have exactly the same main title. But whereas set B has a table of contents page assigning each lecture its own title, set A lacks such a page, and all the lectures it contains are untitled. The titles used here are thus taken from set B, but it was natural to prefer publication of set A as the full version.

Both sets begin by presenting current political philosophy as severely confused. In particular, what the 1925 ms had termed 'realistic' or 'naturalistic' theories of the state are criticized because they either conflate political philosophy with some other approach to politics or are blind to it altogether. In the second lecture, this confusion is traced to erroneous conceptions of the nature of thought in general and of philosophy in particular. The third lecture deals with specifically political thought, and the fourth, fifth, and sixth lectures successively examine and reject the claims of different types of thinking—historical, scientific, and practical—to provide a philosophical view of politics. The final two lectures explore more satisfactory approaches to political philosophy, but conclude that genuinely philosophical thinking about politics has been rare, and may even, according to the strictest criteria, be impossible.

This summary makes clear the importance of these lectures for *Experience and its Modes*. That book began with a discussion of the nature of thought in general, before successively examining and rejecting the claims of different types of thinking—historical, scientific, and practical—to provide a philosophical view of experience. The final section explored more satisfactory approaches to philosophy, but concluded that genuinely philosophical thinking was rare. In other words, *Experience and its Modes* was largely a reworking of the 1930 lectures with the parts on politics omitted. Although Oakeshott's first major work said almost nothing about politics, it turns out to have been the outcome of prolonged reflection on exactly that subject. Indeed, politics became the 'absent presence' in the text precisely because of his reflections on it.

We may deal very briefly with the context of the lectures, as we have already set out the intellectual climate of the inter-war years above. We will spend most of our time exploring the arguments of the lectures themselves, and pointing out any significant differences between the two sets. But we will also explore the relationship between the lectures and the arguments of *Experience and its Modes*, before concluding with some more general remarks on the similarities and differences between Oakeshott's early and late political thought.

The prospects for radical political improvement that had still seemed plausible in the mid-1920s looked far bleaker by the end of the decade. Hitler had yet to regain mass support in Germany after his surge in the early 1920s, but Mussolini was entrenched in Italy and Stalinist communism seemed bent on subverting Western Europe from within. Unsurprisingly, there is a notable absence of optimistic statements of the sort we observed in the 1925 ms. Nevertheless, the 1930 lectures restate many of the arguments of the 1925 ms in a slightly different form.

The lectures allowed Oakeshott to air his criticisms of the Cambridge approach to political science publicly, and to expound his own conception of political philosophy as something firmly distinct from empirical political science. Both versions of the first lecture began by treating political philosophy as problematic. Someone new to the subject would probably find the very meaning of Bosanquet's claim that the State was 'a working conception of life' unclear.[45] Political philosophy nevertheless presumably represented 'some kind of thinking about politics' and therefore must belong with other disciplines like history, psychology, and economics that unquestionably also offered ways of thinking about politics. But how did it differ from them?

An answer required investigating the nature of philosophy itself. As in 1925, Oakeshott was arguing that we must first grasp the nature of the genus before proceeding to examine the species. But instead of seeking a definition of philosophy, he offered a

[45] LSE 1/1/7, B1 p. 1.

historical overview of the question, 'What has "Philosophy" meant in the past?'[46] In 1925, Oakeshott had insisted on philosophy as a timeless activity, but the 1930 lectures recognise definite shifts in the meaning of philosophy, and also perhaps place more emphasis on its reflexive nature (though this was certainly already present in 1925). The task of philosophy is said to be 'to think about thinking, to turn thought back upon itself'.[47]

Initially, 'philosophy' signified a general curiosity, as it did amongst the pre-Socratics from whom intellectual pursuits remained 'undifferentiated'. For Plato, however, philosophy was 'beginning to have a technical meaning'. The Platonic philosopher was both a specialist and 'freed from the narrowness of view which accompanies much specialization'. Moreover, politics was a central object of concern for this type of intellectual, who was a 'disinterested, judicious, scientific expert'. But thanks to Aristotle, all forms of knowledge continued to be thought of as in some sense 'philosophy' throughout the medieval era. From the seventeenth century onward, the period when modern philosophy could be said to have begun, we begin to find 'a firmer and more logical differentiation of intellectual interests', nevertheless in the early twentieth century philosophy was still conflated with 'the "scientific" attitude' in particular.[48]

Both the 1930 lectures and *Experience and its Modes* were deliberate contributions to this effort to identify the limits of the various forms of thought, and in particular to untangle the confusion between science and philosophy. Their ongoing separation was part of an overall 'tendency of history...to distinguish intellectual pursuits from one another'.[49] Their differences had been obscured by their common opposition to the 'domination' over thought exercised by theology and the church. At the same time, it was a general truth about the history of ideas that 'All studies have

[46] LSE 1/1/7, B1 p. 4.
[47] p. 144.
[48] LSE 1/1/7, B1 pp. 6–7.
[49] LSE 1/1/7, B1 pp. 7–9.

been slow to recognize their own limits'. The contemporary desire 'to merge philosophy into natural science and...admit it no separate existence' was just another illustration of this tendency.[50]

Oakeshott may have been paying more attention to the history of philosophy than hitherto, but his Rationalist prejudice that philosophical definition was the ultimate goal of all thinking remained alive, as the beginning of the second lecture makes clear. 'The history of a thing can never tell us *what* the thing is...Every question is logical before it is historical'. Both versions of this lecture are nevertheless intended to demonstrate the existence of distinct types of thinking. Even simple sensations and perceptions counted as thought; a simple judgment such as 'I perceive a book' involved imposing 'our past experiences upon a certain object before us'.[51]

These arguments are familiar from *Experience and its Modes*, as is the claim that moral and scientific judgments, just as much as sensations and perceptions, represent distinct types of thinking. If we ask what all these types of thinking have in common, the answer is twofold. All types of thinking seek, first, 'to break down all isolations in experience', and second, to 'build up a unified experience'. 'Thinking experience aims at relating … To break down the isolation of a particular event or experience is to explain it'.

'Explanation' was being used here as a synonym for 'giving unity or coherence to experience'; it had nothing to do with establishing general laws for causal relations, the sense it had by then acquired in philosophy of science.[52] We should note, though, that this usage was thoroughly anti-sceptical in intention. Insofar as we successfully explain our experiences by classifying and relating them to one another we are supposedly producing Truth, with a capital 'T'. 'The Truth is a unified, coherent experience'.

The metaphor used to illustrate this view is a revealing one. Thinking is said to be 'like a river' whose 'destiny is to reach the

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[50] p. 148.

[51] LSE 1/1/7, B2 pp. 1–2.

[52] LSE 1/1/7, B2 p. 3. Compare J.S. Mill, *Logic*, 8th edn (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1882), p. 332.

sea'. The sea is analogous to the world of completely satisfactory philosophical definition, but on the way there are 'twists and tributaries' which constitute 'divisions in the world of thinking'. Moreover, each river mistakes itself for the sea; 'a number of little worlds are created, and each claims to be true'. Again, this is the argument of *Experience and its Modes*, in which scientific, historical, and practical experience are 'arrests' in a process that left to itself would logically result in fully satisfactory philosophical experience.

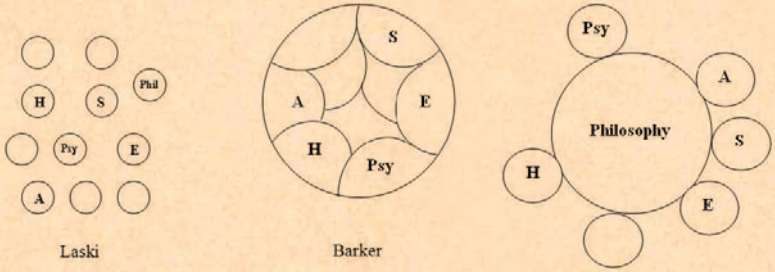
Both versions of this lecture also reject the idea (ascribed to Bacon in B2 and to Kant in A2) that different forms of thought are correlates of separate mental faculties such as memory, reason, and imagination. There were, Oakeshott insisted, no such faculties, and it was impossible to deduce their existence from the existence of separate forms of thought. A2 is particularly harsh on this view, describing it as 'the crudest possible and the most complicated explanation of the facts'. The theory of faculties does not explain the relation between the various forms of thinking it identifies. Even if we regard the faculties as just 'postulates', the theory itself is a bad one because 'it explains nothing, it merely draws a line'.

The lectures also reject the idea, attributed to Comte and Hegel, that each form of thought 'corresponds with a stage in the development of thought'.[53] A2 is rather more sympathetic to the idea of a hierarchy of stages of thought than is B2, which rejected it outright; the possibility of 'arranging the different kinds of thinking in a hierarchy according to their history' is conceded, and an historical hierarchy is distinguished from a logical one in which types of thinking are arranged according simply to their 'value for the attainment of truth'. Hegel is associated with both positions, but Oakeshott made clear he was sceptical about Hegel's claim to have succeeded in constructing such orders of intellectual rank. Moreover, he disavowed any similar enterprise of his own.

Even if we admit that thinking is 'always the activity of the whole mind', the question of the relation between different kinds of thinking remains. To illustrate the various possibilities, in B2

[53] LSE 1/1/7, B2 p. 4.

Oakeshott used a diagram (see below), something he never did in his published works.



The first option, attributed to Laski (Wallas's successor as Professor of Political Science at the London School of Economics in 1926), represents the claim that 'All are equally true; you can choose which you like, and it doesn't matter which you choose'. Oakeshott was completely dismissive: 'It explains nothing simply to call it an alternative to something else'.[54] Nevertheless, that 'all are equally true' was more or less the position he ultimately adopted himself. While he always insisted that the form of understanding to be employed was determined by the nature of the question at issue, he eventually came to see science, history, practice, and philosophy as identical in status, though not in logical structure.

The second diagram represents the position of Barker (appointed Cambridge's first Professor of Political Science in 1927). It suggests that different forms of thought are parts of the same whole and 'all contribute to the complete truth'. But it is not clear, according to Oakeshott, how they do so in reality, and unless we know this, 'we know nothing'.

Only the third and final diagram was adequate, because it exemplified the 'Abstract-Concrete principle'. The smaller circles (in which the letters presumably stand for 'Psychology', 'Art'(?), 'Science', 'History', and 'Economics') are 'abstract' kinds of thinking. That is, 'the particular kind of whole, or truth they achieve', is not a complete whole and is, consequently, 'not really

[54] LSE 1/1/7, B2 p. 5.

true'.[55] These terms—'abstract' and 'concrete'—are central to the argument of *Experience and its Modes*, but they were employed first in these lectures.

B2 suggests that we normally use the word 'abstract' to mean anything 'non-material', and 'concrete' to signify 'anything we can touch and see'. The key meaning for Oakeshott, however, was not tangibility or visibility, but completeness. Using a similar example to one he had employed in 1925, he argued that a complete classification of paintings in a gallery with respect to their size and weight would produce an 'incomplete unity', because it failed to acknowledge the paintings as paintings. The problem, as we observed, is that the criterion for 'completeness' in such instances unavoidably makes reference to the subjective purposes of agents.

A2 tries a different tack, emphasizing instead that the terms 'abstract' and 'concrete' help to distinguish different members of a genus. 'Definition, the old logic taught us, is *per genus et differentiam*'. But one may concede that 'thinking may have different degrees of abstraction' without agreeing that 'the more abstract [thinking] is, the less of the whole truth is in it'. This claim was essential, however, if Oakeshott was to sustain his belief in a kind of 'concrete thinking' that 'gives the only true and complete unity to experiences'. Unfortunately, his conclusion that the common world is less 'true' than the world of concrete philosophy because it was more 'abstract' did not follow from the arguments he presented. In *On Human Conduct*, he was explicit that ordinary thought and action are adequate to their own purposes.

Oakeshott eventually realised, in other words, that preventing confusion between different forms of argument and thus avoiding 'a dispute of cross-purposes' did not require insisting on the contrast between 'concrete' philosophy and all other forms of 'abstract' thought. The change is signalled by the very different meaning he later attached to the word 'conditional'. In 1925, he remarked that all 'abstract' truth would be 'conditional, partial, incomplete truth', whereas in 1975, conditionality was no longer equated

[55] LSE 1/1/7, B2 p. 6.

with partiality or incompleteness. Instead, *all* thought, including philosophical thought, is said to be conditional, and only the differing nature of their conditions allows us to distinguish the various forms of thought from one another.

The third lecture attempted to take the next step in the argument by identifying the nature of philosophical thought about politics in particular. The failure to be self-conscious about the nature of the perspective we are adopting towards political activity entailed a failure to recognize that '"politics" is a different "thing" for each of the different ways we may think about it'.[56] Oakeshott observed that this seemed counter-intuitive; we ordinarily expect the nature of a thing to dictate our approach to it. But what philosophy does is to put in question the nature of things: 'how are you to know *what* [a thing] is until you have thought about it?'

Oakeshott sounded a Kantian note when he declared that 'it is only in some very ambiguous sense that there is a "thing" there at all before we start thinking. The raw materials of the "thing" may be there, but the real thing certainly isn't as far as you or I are concerned.'[57] That the bare fact of their existence is the only knowledge of things in themselves that we can have apart from our perception of them was exactly the position of *Experience and its Modes*. The existence of a plurality of forms of abstract thought stems from the fact that things display a variety of aspects to us, each requiring a different form of understanding; the results of any given form of abstract thought are 'limited to a single aspect of a thing'.

Within its own limits, however, each form of abstract thought is sovereign. It was irrelevant to criticise a scientific argument in philosophical terms, or an historical claim from a practical point of view, since the different presuppositions of the various modes rendered them immune to criticism from arguments that did not share them. The thesis that for 'as long as each kind of abstract thinking knows its own limitations and keeps to them, it is not

[56] p. 163.
[57] p. 162.

subject to the criticism of any other kind of thinking or of concrete thinking' would play a central role in *Experience and its Modes* and thereafter, but it was first articulated in these lectures.

Oakeshott's use of the term *ignoratio elenchi*, or irrelevance, is further proof that the lectures provided the foundation for *Experience and its Modes*, where the phrase was used repeatedly. His source for it is obscure, though irrelevance has long been recognized as a so-called 'informal fallacy'. It has its ultimate origin in classical logic, specifically the Latin translation of Aristotle's *Sophistical Refutations*.[58] Whether he knew of it from Aristotle first-hand is unclear, as the source cited in A3 is actually J.S. Mill's *Logic*, and the term is used too by Schopenhauer, whom Oakeshott was also reading at this time. Nor, unfortunately, is it clear whether it was Aristotle whom Oakeshott had in mind when he remarked that an unnamed philosopher 'Once said that almost all wrong thinking results from the "confusion of the categories"'.[59]

The conception of political philosophy as the investigation of 'organized social life and all that goes with it' is clearly continuous with the ideas of the 1925 ms. There, Oakeshott had argued at length for the identity of self and society. The 1930 lectures pointed towards the same view: 'a sensibility for society is the sense of a membership of a whole indistinguishable from one's self'. Philosophical recognition of this truth, however, necessarily post-dated experience of it, a point he emphasized with a quotation from Browning: 'Justinian's Pandects only make precise / What simply sparkled in men's eyes before'. This argument that practice preceded theory in politics was one of the most widely noticed ideas in *Rationalism in Politics* (1961), but Oakeshott's use of this passage from Browning (which he might have encountered from Maitland's citation in *Township and Borough*) makes it likely that it was suggested to him much earlier by his reading in literature and history.[60]

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[58] Aristotle, *Sophistical Refutations*, Bk 1 Ch. v.

[59] LSE 1/1/7, B3 p. 2.

[60] See p. 163 n. 2, below.

The lecture also contains an acknowledgement of a problem that would occupy Oakeshott for his entire life, the ambiguous quality of political speech. In politics, 'not only are the words we use ambiguous', but an analytical vocabulary is lacking. 'Just where we require the utmost coolness and detachment, we are forced to use words commonly connected with warm feeling'.[61] His proposal was to replace the term 'political thought', which supposedly referred to a single object, with 'political thinking' in the hope of bringing about a 'radical reformation' based on the recognition of a plurality of approaches to politics. His later work placed more emphasis on understanding politics without employing its vocabulary, but the starting point in the problem of ambiguity was unchanged.

To make clearer the problems that resulted from taking all political thought to be of the same kind, Oakeshott singled out some specific terms. B3 singled out 'political theory', 'the state', 'sovereignty', and 'law'; A3, instead of 'sovereignty' and 'law', examined the words 'society' and 'real'. Despite choosing different examples, however, he was concerned in both cases to show that the terms mentioned had different meanings depending on whether one encountered them in philosophical, legal, scientific, or moral contexts. This was something he believed writers of all political persuasions, including Gierke, Sorel, Laski, and Zimmern, had failed to recognize adequately.

The consequences of this failure were far-reaching. 'All the old conceptions will have to go. Thinkers can no longer be classed as Democratic, or Pluralist, or Communist, or Realist or Idealist'.[62] Arguably, in the later twentieth century, Oakeshott's demand that we 'rewrite our histories' of political thought was fulfilled by historians of political thought like Burrow, Black, Collini, Jay, Koselleck, Pocock, Skinner and others. Ironically, however, he himself made little contribution to this rewriting; and of those just

[61] p. 164.
[62] LSE 1/1/7, B3 p. 6.

mentioned, only Black has engaged with Oakeshott's account of the history of political thought in any detail.[63]

Indeed, Oakeshott's next move was not to offer an alternative history of political thought, but to distinguish three different 'abstract' kinds of thinking about politics. The three main 'modes of experience' identified in *Experience and its Modes*—science, history, and practice—now appear, but in the guise of alternatives to 'the old way of classifying thinking about politics'. Scientific, historical, and practical thinking are 'the three most important ways of thinking about society', and each 'has claimed to be the philosophical approach to politics'. The following three lectures examine them in turn.

The fourth lecture begins by arguing that 'scientific thinking about politics' could take various forms; it might actually bear the name 'political science', or it might be called sociology or anthropology ('ethnology'). All of these disciplines presupposed a 'strict correspondence' between the study of politics and scientific thought, though the science that was to provide the template for political studies varied. Biology had been a popular nineteenth-century candidate; others included anatomy, pathology, physiology, and psychology. But all of these proposals suffered, so Oakeshott argued, from an inadequate understanding of what gave science its distinctive qualities. It was not simply its subject matter that gave a science its identity; there was also the question of 'how' that science approached its object.

Oakeshott's view of science drew heavily on the ideas of the physicist Arthur Eddington.[64] Eddington was certainly not his only source; he also quoted Collingwood and Whitehead.[65] But it was

[63] See A. Black, *Guild and State European Political Thought from the Twelfth Century to the Present* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 2003).

[64] See A. Eddington, 'The Domain of Physical Science', in *Science, Religion, and Reality*, ed. J. Needham (London: Macmillan, 1925), pp. 187–218.

[65] See R.G. Collingwood, *Speculum Mentis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1924), p. 167, and A.N. Whitehead, 'The Concept of Nature', in

Eddington's example of an elephant sliding down Madingley Hill on a Tuesday afternoon that he used (without acknowledgment) in A4. The scientific observer discounts such details of the event as his own emotional response, the fact that what he is seeing is an elephant, the place name, and so forth. What remains is 'Two tons … sliding down an incline plane set at 45° to the horizon and 100 feet in length [in] 15.4 seconds'. Science explores a 'common world … in terms which do not depend upon personal experiences; and such description creates a purely "objective" world'. As such, it is 'interested only in that which is physically measurable'.[66]

This principle of measurement was the source of both the distinctiveness of science and of its abstract nature.[67] 'There is nothing which cannot be measured in some way or other; but, equally, there is nothing the *whole* nature of which is comprehended by such measurement'.[68] For science, 'every occurrence is interesting only insofar as it is an instance of a general rule'. An average, for example, 'is true of a class, but not of any individual in it', and science as a whole was 'a true description of one aspect of everything'.

The issue for our purposes is of course the use to which this philosophy of science was put. By employing it to establish not only sociology, but also economics and psychology, as genuinely scientific, Oakeshott could argue that therefore they were non-philosophical ways of studying politics, though not simply invalid.[69] He actually recommended Durkheim's *The Rules of Sociological Method* (in which sociology was grouped with psychology and

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An Anthology, ed. F.S.C. Northrop and M.W. Gross (Cambridge: CUP, 1953), p. 201.

[66] LSE 1/1/7, B4 p. 6.

[67] For discussions of Oakeshott's philosophy of science see E. Podoksik, 'The Scientific Positivism of Michael Oakeshott', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 12:2 (2004), 297–318, and B. Kaldis, 'Oakeshott on Science as a Mode of Experience', *Zygon*, 44:1 (2009), 169–96.

[68] LSE 1/1/7, B4 p. 6.

[69] LSE 1/1/7, B4 p. 4.

biology as one of the 'natural sciences') to those desiring a defence of sociology as a science.[70]

Oakeshott took issue, however, with the claim that there was a distinct order of 'social facts'. Durkheim had attempted to distinguish social facts from other types (such as psychological facts) by arguing that social facts are 'ways of acting or thinking with the peculiar characteristic of exercising a coercive influence on individual consciousness'.[71] He believed that Durkheim had simply failed to appreciate that 'facts' are shaped by the perspective we adopt as well as the nature of the object under examination. Despite these criticisms, Oakeshott did not make it impossible for sociology to claim scientific status; it did not, for example, have to be able to discover changeless laws of society.

Indeed, it was characteristic of all scientific laws that they were liable to change. 'All sciences are constantly being reformed … sociology is not peculiar in this respect'. Oakeshott was never tempted by the idea of science as a timelessly valid model of all explanation. Nor did he think sociology needed to be able successfully to predict human behaviour to qualify as scientific, a position he actually shared with Durkheim.[72] It was an error to suppose that 'the exactness of a science is dependent upon its subject', when in fact it depended on its assumptions. All sociology needed to do to qualify as a genuine science was show itself capable of the 'ordering of observations by hypotheses or "laws"'.

In *Experience and its Modes*, which did not need to address the problem of whether disciplines like sociology or psychology offered genuine philosophies of politics, Oakeshott was notably less convinced by their scientific claims. He wrote, for example, that 'a radical confusion between the scientific and the historical mode

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[70] É. Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, ed. G.E. Catlin, 8th edn (New York: The Free Press, 1966 [1895; English translation 1938]), p. 1.

[71] Durkheim, 'Preface' to *Sociological Method*, p. liii.

[72] Durkheim, *Sociological Method*, declares 'All scientific prevision is impossible' at p. 118.

of thinking still stands in the path of sociology'.[73] But already in 1930 he was committed to the position that neither natural nor social science was a substitute for philosophy. Nor could political philosophy be in any sense a 'science of the sciences' consisting of a number of the social sciences in combination. While philosophy could no more criticise the methods and conclusions of social science than they might criticise it, they were distinct enterprises.

The two versions of the lecture on history begin with some notable vacillation. B5 began with the confident declaration that we 'need not spend time showing that History is really a kind of thinking', but A5 was more hesitant, saying that 'we are not accustomed to regard History as a kind of thinking'. Nevertheless, Oakeshott was confident both that history was a distinctive form of thought, and that, like science, it was defective. He dealt first with the claim that historical and philosophical thought about politics were in fact identical. His target here was speculative philosophy of history, but again the different versions betray some uncertainty. In B5, speculative philosophy of history is presented as confusion between history and science, but in A5 it is the product of a confusion between history and philosophy.

B5 criticised contemporary political science as 'a hybrid kind of thinking made up of a mixture of Science and History'. McIver's *The Modern State*, for example, gave an account of early medieval England that was 'vitiated by his attempts to make historical events instances of a law' according to which 'Feudalism follows Empire'. Because it tried 'to be scientific and historical at the same moment', it ultimately 'fails in both'. A5, however, claimed that it was philosophy rather than science that was supposed to 'discover the general laws which govern the whole course of history'. Oakeshott's uncertainty on this point is understandable if one realises that the speculative approach to history has claimed both a philosophical and a scientific basis; this is one source of the difference between the Hegelian and Marxist philosophies of history, for example.

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[73] Oakeshott, *Experience and its Modes* (*EM*) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991 [1933]), p. 178.

A weaker claim was that history provided the '*basis* on which to build a philosophy of politics'. In a sense, Oakeshott himself eventually embraced this latter position, but in these lectures he wanted to draw a firm distinction between the objects of historical and philosophical knowledge. While all historical objects (persons and events) are unique in that their identity is specific to their own time and place, their reliance on these criteria also meant, Oakeshott argued, that they are less than fully individual. Full individuality implied self-sufficiency, but the contextual dependence of historical individuals meant that they were 'abstract', though in a different way to the objects of science. Both science and history make the assumption of 'a world of events independent of their being known', but whereas science asks 'what *must* have happened according to all the laws of probability', history asks 'only what *did* happen'.

The philosophy of history advanced in *Experience and its Modes* saw Oakeshott labelled a 'constructionist' because of his argument that 'The historian's business is...to create and to construct' a narrative of events based on the evidence,[74] but already in 1930 he was telling his students that 'history is *creating* the past, and is a matter of *thinking*, of criticism and selection and building up, all the time'. Histories of politics were like all other genres of history in this respect. Their objects, in contrast to the objects of scientific thought, were individuals rather than averages; Napoleon rather than the normal human being.

It was the specific business of history to study 'the interrelations between things regarded as individual and unique' with respect to their temporal aspect. When Oakeshott quoted Bryce's remark that 'The great object of teaching history is to enable people to realize that there is no such thing as a normal world', he meant 'normal' in the strict sense; the natural sciences dealt 'solely with what is average, what can be repeated', but historical events were unrepeatable by virtue of their very nature. In the language of logic, the historian's judgments are singular judgments, and consequently categorical judgments'.

[74] *EM*, p. 93.

All these arguments recur in *Experience and its Modes*, which also followed the lectures in arguing that history is abstract partly because it refers its facts to 'a world which can never be completed—for always part of it is in the future. The historical series is without an end'. Furthermore, history 'postulates an objective series of facts, independent of the historian' and thus fails to acknowledge the role that subjectivity plays in it. Finally, history is in a sense parasitic on practice for its subject matter: 'No question can be historical without being a question of another kind first'.

Oakeshott later abandoned all of these criticisms. The attempt to convict historical individuals and events as abstract simply because they were conditional identities made no sense given that they could take no other shape. Similarly, the incompleteness of the historical series was only problematic if our interest in it is the significance for ourselves of an event (so that, for example, the consequences of the French revolution may be said to be still working themselves out) rather than why the event occurred at all; the question of 'relevance' is clearly a practical rather than an historical issue. Nor is it the case that reflective historians must deny the place of subjectivity in the construction of events, even if the past cannot be merely what the historian would like it to have been. And finally, history need not wait for practice to supply it with questions about the past, even though many historical questions begin as practical problems.

'Practical' thinking was the final type of thinking Oakeshott examined in support of the contrast between abstract and concrete thinking about politics. As in 1925, he acknowledged that all activity was in a sense practical, even thinking, for all thought 'aims at producing some change in the mind'. 6A cites Aristotle's remark that 'Thought is also activity' in support of this view, and also introduces the idea that an 'activity of *will*' lies behind all thinking, though 'will' is described as an abstraction, like 'practical reason' and 'the moral faculty'. *Experience and its Modes* made will the principal category of practical experience, showing once again its foundations in the ideas of the lectures.[75]

[75] Cp. *EM*, pp. 261, 305.

Practical thinking was 'directed solely towards producing some practical change...in the external world'. Such thinking need not consist solely in action, though it might. Any political thinking that 'issues in a "programme for action"' belonged under this heading, whether it aimed at reform or maintaining the status quo. Practical political thought, in Oakeshott's view, had 'so influenced men that it is often denied that there is any other kind of thinking possible'. It had both co-opted scientific and historical forms of thought for political ends and condemned philosophical ideas about politics as either 'unpractical' or 'immoral'. In doing so, it was of course overreaching itself in the same way that science or history overreached themselves in claiming to be 'concrete' thinking.

In B6, G.D.H. Cole, Hobhouse, Laski, Bertrand Russell, and the Webbs are all identified as committing such errors. Cole's pluralism, for example, had 'an avowedly practical aim', namely, to '"discredit" the state, and its sovereign position'. Moreover, Cole's treatment of the idea of the 'real will' in his work on *Social Theory* as fundamentally anti-democratic missed the point. The theory of the real will described the State as it always is and necessarily must be; it was not a constitution that could be adopted or rejected, but a metaphysical truth. As such, however, it had no practical implications, and to criticize it as if it did was to mistake its nature.

The focus of practical thinking was on what ought to be—in effect, on the future. In contrast, the 'consciously concrete world... would be neither phenomenal, nor subject to the ordinary notions of space and time...a world in which "ought" and "shall" would have no meaning, where growth would be an anomaly and change an impossibility'. In general, Oakeshott's descriptions of 'concrete' experience were remarkably reminiscent of the Platonic world of eternal Ideas; in the seventh lecture he contrasted the temporal world of human experience ('which, in a sense, we all construct') with a timeless ideal totality ('both unmakeable and indestructible'). This view persisted in *Experience and its Modes*, where philosophy was identified with experience *sub specie aeternitatis*. When stated

so starkly, it becomes all the more obvious how complete his later abandonment of it was.

Having dismissed science, history, and practice as incapable of providing a satisfactory political philosophy, Oakeshott still had to venture a positive account of political philosophy. The seventh lecture explores what happens when we forswear abstraction, but still fail to follow the requirements of philosophical thinking fully. We end up with a kind of 'pseudo-philosophical' thinking, although 'a great deal nearer to achieving concreteness than either Science, History, or Practice'. Oakeshott acknowledged that his criteria for genuine political philosophy were extremely strict; so strict, in fact, that he was unable to offer 'even a single example of this pure, concrete thinking about politics'. Indeed, he found himself defending the rather implausible view that Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, Spinoza, and Rousseau had never written true political philosophy.

Rousseau and Hegel had perhaps come closest, but even they had constantly relapsed into abstraction. They were vastly more satisfactory than Laski or Hobhouse; nevertheless, they had not stuck to the aim of philosophical thinking—to see a thing 'as it really is'—as rigorously as they might. This was of course the aim the 1925 ms had also insisted on, of seeing the object of inquiry as 'part of the ultimate whole of reality—the real whole, or universe', and Oakeshott's claim that genuine political philosophy had never been written should really be taken as a comment on the untenable nature of his own position.

The viewpoint which came nearest to avoiding the pseudo-philosophic failure to resolve the apparent opposition between State and Society was 'the social'. Invoking Plato and Bosanquet once more, Oakeshott revived his argument that individuality was always dependent on its environment. The individual man is not physical but 'Social...man seen in all his connections with the full social world to which he belongs'. Since this social world includes the state, it can be said that the State is a necessary requirement for the real individual. The 'plurality and contradiction' visible in the

conflict between 'the State' and 'the individual' would be resolved once the meaning of both terms was rightly understood.

As in 1925, then, Oakeshott remained committed to arguing that political conflicts are apparent rather than real. In contrast, his mature philosophy of civil association provided for the adjudication of conflict but did not explain it away as ultimately illusory from a metaphysical perspective. Nor did it claim to complete the individual; while civil association is a component of civilized life, it is ultimately only one particular type of moral relationship expressed in legal form. Civil association is not concerned with its citizens' being at home in the world.

The differences between the two versions of the final lecture are perhaps greater than those between any of the others in the series. A8 returns to a general consideration of philosophy; B8 addresses the problem for political philosophy of the opposition between state and individual, and argues that the State 'is to the political philosopher what the universe is to philosophy in general, the necessary presupposition of all intelligible existence'. Nevertheless, both deal with the problem of how to get beyond 'pseudo-philosophic' thinking about politics.

In B8, even the political philosophy of British Idealism is said to be 'marred by certain avoidable abstractions'. One was exemplified in the idea of the 'general will', used by T.H. Green to provide a contrast with 'force' as a basis for society. This central concept of Rousseau's political philosophy had set the agenda for British Idealist political thought, and in 1930 Oakeshott could still describe himself giving 'substantially the same answer as [Rousseau]' to the problem of self-government.[76]

In 1975, in contrast, Oakeshott could still have accepted that he was addressing Rousseau's problem, but his solution had come to differ. 'Civil association' offered a less ambitious answer to the question of how self-government is possible by abandoning the notion of 'will' altogether and removing to the sphere of enterprise association any substantive idea of a general good beyond the simple

[76] p. 224.

maintenance of the rule of law. In 1930, though, he saw no way to escape from the concepts of will and the common good as employed by Green and Bosanquet, despite finding them unsatisfactory.

Given this self-confessed failure to develop an adequate conception of political philosophy, we should not be surprised at the ultimately pessimistic conclusion to the lectures. Politics stood condemned as 'something incomplete and abstract', and it was impossible to go any further in thinking about it than those who had employed the principle of sociality had already done. 'Political thinking can never be more than pseudo-philosophic'.

That is not to say that Oakeshott regarded the lectures as a whole as devoid of positive results. First, they had refuted the 'deeply rooted fallacy [that] all thinking is of the same kind' and identified a number of distinct kinds of thought. Second, they had established philosophy as a distinctive form of thinking exclusively devoted to the interrogation of concepts and independent of other kinds of thinking such as science or history. Third, they defined the relationship of the various kinds of thought to one another as one of logical irrelevance. All of these conclusions were indeed positive results on which his later philosophical work would build.

The problem was not the belief that philosophy was useless in any practical sense, a position Oakeshott always maintained. That the philosophical investigation of political concepts could not provide a guide to political action was not incompatible with a positive view of either politics or political philosophy. The problem lay rather in thinking that the world of practical thought and action to which politics belonged was somehow inherently flawed. We have seen that Oakeshott eventually abandoned this conclusion; but the fact that he held this view in the early 1930s would seem to explain why politics subsequently played no part in *Experience and its Modes*.

There was little point in discussing the inherently pseudo-philosophical approach to politics if the aim was to give an account of philosophy which made the contrast between it and the various modes of experience as stark as possible. Equally, however, this view of political philosophy was not likely to prove viable in the long run

for someone as interested in the subject as Oakeshott; indeed by 1930 he was already clearly less confident about it than he had been in 1925. Before he could move forward, though, he had to liberate himself from the beliefs that concrete or philosophical thinking 'supersedes all kinds of abstract thinking' and that the various 'abstract worlds' of science, history, and practice were in the final analysis 'neither true nor real'. In *Experience and its Modes* he still remained under their influence.

IV: Oakeshott's Early and Late Ideas on Political Philosophy Compared

This section develops some of the comparisons made above between the ideas of the early and the late Oakeshott in more detail. Idealism (like socialism) tended to regard the ideal future state as a logical unfolding of what was already contained in the present; as Oakeshott put it in 1925, 'the ideal not only must grow out of the real, but in the fullest sense is contained in the real'.[77] After 1945, if not earlier, he abandoned the notion that political change represented any kind of logical unfolding. Famously, he came to see politics as simply a matter of keeping afloat, and the current direction of the ship of state as an historically contingent matter, even if one could chart its previous course and make some informed guesses about where its current one might lead.

The idea that the development of the State was a necessary process was one that Oakeshott increasingly came to identify with speculative philosophy of history. All-embracing visions of the historical process which revealed the future on the basis of the past came to strike him as examples of practical political theorising rather than either authentically philosophical or historical in nature; they were not necessarily without worth or insight, but were not to be taken at face value. They reflected a practical understanding of the past in which it was understood in relation to present needs.

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[77] p. 83.

Furthermore, in his later work Oakeshott adopted a position much closer to what the 1925 ms had called the 'anthropological' view of the state. On that view, the role of the state was simply to apply restraint: 'nothing is more useful for the preservation of "fair play" than a referee with a strong authority'.[78] The essential feature of civil association according to *On Human Conduct* was the rule of law, which relied on the existence of an authority that could reliably adjudicate indifferently on the inevitable conflicts between its members. For the later Oakeshott, any attempt by the state to determine what he had earlier called the 'real needs and desires' of its members signalled the abandonment of the civil model in favour of 'enterprise association', a form of government devoted to imposing a single common purpose on its members.

There were forms of 'enterprise association' that Oakeshott would have rejected even his youth. In the 1920s he no more regarded the pursuit of 'luxury' as a proper end of government than he did the pursuit of profit in the 1970s. But the Edwardian moral high-mindedness of his early work is conspicuously absent from the later writings. The idea that 'true political life...comes into being with the will to rise...as a whole society' and rests on 'a common will to seek that which gives permanent and common satisfaction' was one that he later explicitly rejected, not simply because of the difficulty of determining what in practice gives common satisfaction, but because it was not the business of government to determine its citizens' satisfactions for them at all.[79]

It is true that the 'common satisfaction' of which Oakeshott wrote in the 1920s did not exist entirely in an institutional setting; social solidarity as he conceived it was a largely informal affair, a matter of friendship, moral sensibility, religion, and culture rather than government, law, and property. Nevertheless, there was an ambiguity in this manner of thinking that he initially failed to recognize, and his early theory of the State lacked the homeostatic resources of civil association. It contained no means of self-criticism

[78] p. 59.
[79] p. 60.

that might help to prevent its own perversion or corruption into one form or another of oppressive instrumentalism.

In 1925 Oakeshott thought of himself as making 'an effort to envisage the principle of the possibility of government and its organ, law', in particular.[80] The Kantian notion of philosophy as a search for the conditions of possible experience continued to inform his later work. *On Human Conduct* still held that philosophy was characterised by the examination of assumptions made by other forms of thinking. But he gradually gave up the notions that philosophy understood phenomena in relation to the logical whole of the universe and that philosophical judgment could give 'a final and real meaning to things by the discovery of their final and real content and value'.[81] The notion of a final and real meaning ceased to make any sense: *On Human Conduct* begins with the declaration that 'understanding is not such that we either enjoy it or lack it altogether'.

Oakeshott always believed that association in a state was a 'moral' relationship of some kind. The relationship between citizens in *On Human Conduct* is still described as a particular type of moral relationship, formally defined by means of law. But in 1925 the moral relationship between associates in a state simply as such was not restricted expressly to a legal form. Rather, the State is spoken of simply as 'a self-governing community whose purpose embraces a way of life'.[82] It presents the State, like all societies, as resting on 'a solidarity of feeling, opinion, and belief'.

Oakeshott's later work, in contrast, viewed civil association as requiring no agreement beyond a common acknowledgment of the authoritative and obligatory status of its laws. Solidarity of feeling (something he came to regard as characteristic of certain forms of enterprise association, such as religious communities) might be desirable and even necessary for some groups, but making it a requirement for membership of a state could be divisive and at

[80] p. 128
[81] p. 66.
[82] p. 71.

worst destructive. In 1925 he paraphrased with approval Spinoza's remark in the *Ethics* that 'all reasonable men agree';[83] but further reflection convinced him that this was not in fact the case.

In *On Human Conduct* Oakeshott argued that a major difference between civil and enterprise association was that in civil association, the associates had made no choice to become members. Since they had never voluntarily asked to join, and could not easily leave, they could not be said to be 'free' in respect of having chosen to join the association. The 'freedom' of the citizen must consist instead of being obliged to observe rules which did not prescribe or prohibit any particular action, but only laid down conditions for the performance of whatever actions were chosen.

In contrast, an enterprise association devoted to the pursuit of a particular purpose did require its members to perform particular actions, be these ritual observances or emergency drills. Freedom in such an association rested on the fact that one had chosen to be a member and could leave again if one so desired; but membership required giving up one's own discretion and accepting that one's actions were to be guided by the aims of the group. In the 1925 ms, the difference between societies of which we are members because of 'a conscious act of joining' and 'societies which we join without being previously consulted as to our willingness to take up membership' is acknowledged, but the implications for freedom of the different terms of membership are not spelt out.[84]

One useful way of understanding Oakeshott's subsequent political thought is thus to see it as disambiguating and deflating his early claim that 'The state is the social whole'. The metaphysics of the rational will was abandoned, and with it the idea of the universe as a perfect self. But amongst the important survivals were an emphasis on the active role of subjectivity and on relationships and contexts, notions which could be extracted from Idealism and transferred to a more modest and sceptical approach without entailing a commitment to any larger metaphysical scheme.

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[83] p. 113.

[84] p. 72.

Another key difference is that Oakeshott was initially convinced that 'society' as he conceived it was not a term for a universal association, and did not rely on any general conception of human nature. He followed Bosanquet in rejecting the view that humanity could form a single ethical community.[85] Thus, Hobhouse's claim in *Elements of Social Justice* that the ultimate ethical community was constituted by humanity as a whole was 'nonsense'.[86] Insofar as the idea of humanity was more than an allusion to a 'vague racial whole', it needed to be understood as mediated by the existence of specific historical communities. I can only come to know 'humanity' through membership of my own society.

Oakeshott never warmed to the idea of any form of international society that could incorporate a genuine world government. He consistently eschewed moral universalism, and always looked askance at natural law. However, his later philosophy of civil association has proved adaptable to the sphere of international relations in a way that his earlier philosophy of the State was not.[87] It is may be that the idea of a common good for humanity as a whole is incoherent; the idea makes sense, if at all, within the confines of a particular political community. Civil association, however, does not predicate the existence of a common good for its members. It is therefore possible to conceive of international 'society' as made up of civil associations which pursue their relations with one another in terms of the rule of law as distinct from their individual interests.

It is notable that Oakeshott's later theory of civil association avoided the stark distinction between state and society visible in his early work. On the one hand, civil association was entirely compatible with its citizens being related to one another in a limitless number of other ways. On the other hand, it was essential to civil association that the relationship between citizens as such was non-instrumental in character. In 1925 he tended to identify state

[85] Bosanquet, *Theory of the State*, p. 329.

[86] p. 111.

[87] See T. Nardin, Law, *Morality, and the Relations of States* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1983).

membership with the shared pursuit of common goals, something that he later realised the Aristotelian notion of the relationship between citizens as one of *philia* or 'friendship' did not automatically entail.[88]

Oakeshott's earlier and later works thus display different understandings of the relations between members of the state as such. Civil association shares the pervasive quality of the State, in that it is a relationship from which no adult member of that association is exempt. But the pervasiveness does not create any shared sense of purpose beyond a minimal commitment to keeping the association going, and even that may lapse in certain circumstances. The civil relationship is also continuous with relations in the State in that there is no absolute distinction between public and private in either case.

'There is no such thing as an "individual" action which is not at the same time an action of the State', Oakeshott wrote in 1925.[89] In 1975 he made a similar point about the conditional nature of the distinction between the public and the private by saying that there are no actions which may not in certain circumstances acquire a legal or political significance, though he would not have attributed to them the status of actions by a social whole like the State. The later Oakeshott would also have found unsatisfactory the suggestion that in any community there are two aspects to government, 'the sphere of action which comes within the special province of command', and another which is 'voluntary, or subject only to permissive legislation'. The former is 'the region of force', which in philosophical terms constituted the will of the government to bring about the good of the State.[90]

For many liberal and utilitarian thinkers the notion of a limit imposed by government, for example in the form of a law, has been treated as an external restraint on freedom, justifiable only insofar as it produced beneficial consequences for society as a whole. However,

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[88] p. 118.
[89] p. 119.
[90] p. 120.

there is an alternative way of thinking about freedom, exemplified in Hobbes, in which there is no freedom (or at least no freedom worth having) without government. At the same time, government, in order to provide freedom, must respect the limitations imposed by the nature of its own activity. 'By sheer physical coercion [government] could regulate many social activities hitherto left in the hands of other kinds of State action, but in so doing would defeat its own ends.'[91]

This point that 'It is beyond the right of government to legislate' on matters on which legislation cannot be effective ('because it is beyond its might') prompted a closer reflection on the nature of law. A law that simply commanded 'be moral' would, Oakeshott argued, 'be one contradicting the very principles of legislation'. But this does not mean that 'the will of the law is not as universal as the will of morality'. Government shared the larger wish that 'the moral standard roughly accepted by our society' be upheld, for example by providing better public housing and thus reducing the sexual immorality Edwardian reformers believed to be consequent upon overcrowded living conditions.[92]

It is instructive, therefore, to compare Oakeshott's early suggestion that the legislative command of government in this case would take the form 'be sufficiently housed' with the notion of law in a civil association as he later came to understand it. The early Oakeshott rejected the idea of law as 'a command issuing from some power outside ourselves'. Instead, he favoured the pluralist view of law developed by a 'general movement' involving 'Durkheim and Duguit in France...Roscoe Pound in America, and Mr Laski in England'. This movement viewed law as 'not so much a command, but a means of organization, the aim of which is not to compel men, but to serve public need'. Law could however be thought of as a command if it entailed the idea of 'a voice which tells us what we

[91] p. 122.
[92] p. 123.

really desire', thus also reconciling it with the view of law contained in the Idealist metaphysics of the rational will.[93]

For the later Oakeshott, law was better thought of as analogous to a rule in a game than either as an order or a functional device. A genuine law imposed what he called 'adverbial conditions' on action. Consider, for example, the traffic regulation that everyone must drive on the left-hand side of the road. 'Drive on the left' might seem like a straightforward injunction, but this was misleading; it stated only that *if* one were to drive, one must do so in this fashion. It did not require anyone to drive anywhere in particular, or even to own a car. But it is difficult to see how 'Be sufficiently housed' can be construed in this way. To render it as an adverbial condition it would have to be taken to mean that one should do whatever one does 'housedly'.

This command would arguably fail to conform to the civil notion of law in at least two ways. First, it imposes a substantive form of life—living in a house—which is inconsistent with civil association insofar as it leaves no room for an itinerant lifestyle. Obliging people to reside in houses goes beyond imposing conditions on self-chosen activities by proscribing a certain condition of life, in contrast to driving while remaining on the left. Second, while the later Oakeshott would not necessarily have disapproved of public housing, the concept of a law as an 'adverbial condition' did not encompass the distribution of material benefits. A civil association might engage in welfare provision, but this was a different task to law-making. The use of law as a tool of policy was something he came to associate exclusively with enterprise association.

Nevertheless, Oakeshott's fundamental understanding of the aim of government arguably remained unchanged; the provision of a framework within which civilised life and thought could flourish. Put this way, one can understand why he initially thought of law as a means to an end.[94] What changed was his view of the nature of the end involved; civil association, he came to think, had no

[93] pp. 125–6.
[94] pp. 127–8.

end beyond its own maintenance. It was certainly not concerned with the pursuit of moral and cultural improvement, unlike the State of the 1925 ms. Thus, while his ultimate aim was arguably always to defend a theory of government as an inherently self-limiting concept, both the grandiose metaphysical vocabulary and the particular ethical commitments contained in his early work, were, he gradually realised, unsuitable and unnecessary for its achievement.

V: A Note on the Texts

The 1925 ms at LSE 1/1/3 is a fragile typescript with some autograph corrections and emendations; it may well be a final draft rather than the version that was actually submitted as part of Oakeshott's Fellowship application. It is, however, a complete text, and despite the poor condition of some of its pages, is easily decipherable. The same is true of the two autograph versions of the lectures at LSE 1/1/7. Both versions are complete texts, and since Oakeshott, particularly at this early stage of his life, wrote a very legible hand, there are no gaps or omissions in the versions presented here.

In Set A there initially seemed to be a gap in the ms of lecture 4, as the section numbers jump from 6 to 11 in the original, but in fact this is not the case. Following p. 3, half a page of text numbered '4' has been inserted, and the numbering of p. 5 onwards is the result of a repagination. The original page numbers have been crossed out, resulting in a continuous page numbering from 1 to 16. It therefore appears this is actually a complete but revised version of the lecture, and that Oakeshott had renumbered the pages but omitted to renumber the sections following section 6.

Whatever Oakeshott's merits as a thinker, he was not a particularly scrupulous scholar. Although he took more trouble to provide references in the 1925 ms than he ever would again, his citations are frequently vague and omit all sorts of relevant information including page references. While the *Selected Writings*

makes no claim to be a fully critical edition, the material presented here did seem to require more active editorial intervention than in previous volumes. 'Nettleship says somewhere' and 'from a Glasgow pamphlet (1921)' are two particularly egregious examples of an almost wilful airiness in quotation that the editor failed to rectify, but in general, references have hopefully been brought up to standard more acceptable to a modern reader.

Where the provision of supplementary bibliographical detail simply involved noting details such as the name of the publisher or a page number, it has not been marked; but outright editorial insertions are indicated by the use of square brackets, [thus]. Quotations have been checked for accuracy and traced where possible. Additional material has also been added, silently when Oakeshott clearly intended to include it in the main text but had omitted to transcribe the passage in question, and as indicated in the notes whenever it seemed helpful to have some indication of the contents of the texts referred to. LSE 1/1/3 was more fully annotated than LSE 1/1/7, but marginalia in the lectures have sometimes been presented as footnotes in order to indicate Oakeshott's sources or preserve some additional comments. Noteworthy deletions or alternatives have also been retained as footnotes. Where the lectures re-use quotations from the earlier ms, as they sometimes do, this has also been noted.

Part 1: A Discussion of Some Matters Preliminary to the Study of Political Philosophy

Introduction

> On every subject, my friend, there is but one mode of beginning for those who would deliberate well. They must know what the thing is on which they are deliberating, or else of necessity go altogether astray. Most men however are blind to the fact that they are ignorant of the essential character of each individual thing. Fancying therefore that they possess this knowledge, they come to no mutual understanding at the outset of their enquiry, and in the sequel they exhibit the natural consequence, an inconsistency with themselves and each other. Plato, *Phaedrus*, 237b–c[1]

In the following essay, better described as a collection of notes, perhaps, even, with Bacon, as 'brief notes set down curiously rather than significantly,'[2] I shall attempt, as the title imports, to review some only of the preliminary questions which must occupy the mind of any who sets himself to a study of political philosophy. An introduction to the study it is not, except in the sense of being an attempt to see clearly what must be done if we are to have a coherent philosophy of political life. Perhaps it is most fitly represented as merely an effort to put into focus the telescope of the mind preparatory to a survey of the whole field of study. Thus, though the process must be described in terms of the features of the landscape, it does not pretend to an exhaustive examination of them.

It is admitted on all sides that so large a subject requires some preliminary study before it is embarked upon as a whole, but the nature of that preface is often mistaken. It is thought that special study of some small department is the best training for one who is ambitious someday to embrace the whole. But this arises from a confusion of mind. In an historical subject, to study it in parts, venturing first upon those which are less subtle until at last the

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[1] [Plato, *The Phaedrus, Lysis, and Protagoras of Plato. A New and Literal Translation, Mainly from the Text of Bekker*, tr. J. Wright (London: John W. Parker, 1848), pp. 18–19.]

[2] [F. Bacon, dedication intended for the 1612 Essays but not published, *The Essays*, ed. J. Pitcher (London: Penguin, 1985), p. 239.]

whole is circumvented,[3] is an obvious recourse, though one not without grave disadvantages. But in the case of a philosophical study—the exact nature of which we will discuss later on—it has but the slenderest justification. The exigent preliminary study is not a minute inquisition of some special department, but the most exacting exploration of those elementary considerations which underlie all thought on the subject. For whoever begins to think about the nature of things, what had seemed to him separate entities come so to join and connect themselves in his mind that, though they must be examined apart for the sake of clearness, to study them thus is seen to be studying lifeless abstractions. The whole of any one thing cannot be seen apart from those things with which it is indisseverably united, indeed, not until we see the whole of everything. Thus, if we look at the matter fairly, an historical enquiry offers neither the prerequisite training of mind, nor the necessary groundwork of study. And if we can avoid silly vagueness,[4] we shall do well to follow the Grammarian, and

> Image the whole, then execute the parts—
> Fancy the fabric
> Quite, ere you build, ere steel strike fire from quartz
> Ere mortar dab brick![5]

These notes might suitably have been cast in the form of an appreciation and criticism of contemporary political speculation, or of remarks on the history of political philosophy, but I shall endeavour to limit strictly any critical or historical remarks (reserving them perhaps for another occasion), and apply myself

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[3] [Oakeshott is using 'circumvent' in its primary sense of 'encompass', see *OED*.]

[4] G.W.F. Hegel, 'Introduction' to *The Philosophy of Right,* §3, tr. S.W. Dyde (London: George Bell and Sons, 1896), p. 10: 'Silliness is a defect of logic.' [All subsequent references to *The Philosophy of Right* are to Dyde's translation.]

[5] [R. Browning, 'A Grammarian's Funeral', in *Poetical Works*, ed. S. Hawlin and T.A.J. Burnett, 9 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983–2004), v. 454–62, at 459.]

here to a more purely theoretical discussion of preliminary considerations. They are inevitably incomplete, and possess an interest largely personal. Before he can come to think lucidly on any subject a man must make clear to himself not only the exact nature of the subject of study, but also the precise mental attitude in which he is to approach it. And this is what I here attempt. But because the questions here argued are altogether preliminary it is not to be inferred that on that account they lack a very real importance. The decisive battles of philosophy are often fought on this preliminary ground, and, as I shall have occasion to remark later on, the most important problems of political philosophy are solved or missolved while the mind is still occupied with metaphysics before ever it reaches politics properly so called. Nothing will be found here which is not known well enough; but the mischief is, that it seems to desert our political philosophers just when they stand in greatest need of it: and unless we are quite clear in our minds on all these questions before we start we shall never be free from the dangers of vagueness and misdirection which an inductive and empirical study seems to gather round itself. My attempt is rather to point out the problems which must receive our consideration, than to essay any final solution of them.

Time and again in the history of intellectual development a study has been brought to a standstill—or even worse—by a failure to ask the right questions. The difference between astrology and astronomy is not a difference in subject-matter, but in the questions asked about it. We shall not get the right answers till we ask the right questions; and yet how easily are we contented with wild interrogatives which, eliciting knowledge of a certain sort, are immediately taken as the only possible ones to be addressed to a certain class of subject-matter. The raw material of political philosophy may roughly be delineated as the fundamental social experiences. To study them from the point of view of their meaning, and above all to study their relations with one another, to interrogate them, if possible to discover their coherence, and then, 'when the principle comes', to construct a theory, is the task of political philosophy.

The first of the preliminary questions with which we have set ourselves to deal concerns terminology. But that does not mean that the points under discussion are 'merely verbal': indeed, we should be more scrupulous how we bandy the phrase. There is, of course, a true derogatory meaning to it, yet the fact remains that 'in morals, politics, and philosophy no useful discussion can be entered upon, unless we begin by explaining and understanding the terms we employ.'[6]

The apparently simple, yet in fact bewilderingly complex, question is that which we must ask and answer—What are words? Words are in intention no more than a means of expression; one means among many of expressing thought. The real thing behind a word is the experience which it tries to express, and this must not be confused with the experience which originally brought it into being.[7] But unfortunately they possess another property,

> For words, like Nature, half reveal
> And half conceal the Soul within.[8]

Perhaps part of this obscurity is inevitable, but that which is most dangerous arises from the pernicious habit of *thinking* in terms of mere words and technical phrases; this always and everywhere leads to the most unparalleled confusion.

Words express actual, concrete experience. How do they express it? Shortly, they express it in what we call their meaning. To every

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[6] S.T. Coleridge, *Essays and Lectures on Shakespeare & Some Other Old Poets & Dramatists* (London: J.M. Dent & Co., nd [1914]), p. 397.

[7] Perhaps a single concrete instance will enlighten the subject. '*Anachronism* was used in the eighteenth century for an error in computing time; its modern meaning, first found in Coleridge, is very significant, and conveying as it does the idea of a thing which is appropriate to one age, but out of harmony with another, it expresses a thought, a way of feeling which is very modern, and which would not have needed expression at an earlier period.' L.P. Smith, *The English Language* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1912), pp. 228–9.

[8] [Alfred, Lord Tennyson, 'In Memoriam A.H.H.', V, in *Poems*, ed. C. Ricks (New York: Norton, 1972), pp. 853–98, at 868.]

word there are two parts; on rare occasions and in certain specialized instances these are indistinguishable, commonly they must be examined *per se* if we are to arrive at their significance. These parts are its etymological form and its actual meaning: the etymological form may often be taken to represent the original or primitive meaning. With regard to the development of words, which makes their study so complex, there are few absolute canons. A word may change its form without changing its meaning (though this is rare), or it may change its meaning without any corresponding change in form (this is extremely common), or both form and meaning may undergo change at the same time. A change of meaning, we should remark, implies an added experience. Behind one etymological form may reside a gradual development of meaning and experience, that is, several different meanings culminating in what we call its present meaning. There is one other occasion in which meaning may change without a change in form, when a word is adopted for some specialized and technical purpose. For example, though many of our ordinary words come originally from the vocabulary of law, words in common use with some wide and general reference are often adopted as legal terms and their meaning, for the purposes of law, restricted and specialized.

Another point to note is that two or more quite distinct etymological forms may express the same meaning.[9] The problems of translation often illuminate the real nature of words and their meaning, and a pertinent example of the point under discussion appears in the English equivalent of the Greek . Writers are often taken to task for translating the word as 'state'; it means, it is said, not 'state', but 'city'. But though the words may be wholly different in form, it is possible that the Greek *conception* of city may be

[9] A passage from A. Clutton-Brock, *Studies in Christianity* (London: Constable And Company Limited, 1918), p. 97, affords an excellent footnote to this topic. 'In matters of religion now we are bewildered by a divorce between the names of things and the things themselves. Often those for whom religious facts are real enough do not call them by their religious names, or by any name at all; while those who use the religious names know nothing of the facts.'

rendered most accurately by the English word 'state'. 'City', by its English associations, in spite of its formal affinity to , may be a most misleading and inadequate translation.[10]

The question forced upon us is, What is meaning? Experience has accustomed us to a variety of meanings to every word—not only in the past and gradually developing, but also in the present—and

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[10] Cf. Rousseau, *Du Contrat Social*, Bk 1 ch. vi, note, tr. G.D.H. Cole (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1923), p. 13. ['The real meaning of this word has been almost wholly lost in modern times; most people mistake a town for a city, and a townsman for a citizen. They do not know that houses make a town, but citizens a city. The same mistake long ago cost the Carthaginians dear. I have never read of the title of citizens being given to the subjects of any prince, not even the ancient Macedonians or the English of to-day, though they are nearer liberty than anyone else. The French alone everywhere familiarly adopt the name of citizens, because, as can be seen from their dictionaries, they have no idea of its meaning; otherwise they would be guilty in usurping it, of the crime of *lèse-majesté*: among them, the name expresses a virtue, and not a right. When Bodin spoke of our citizens and townsmen, he fell into a bad blunder in taking the one class for the other. M. D'Alembert has avoided the error, and, in his article on Geneva, has clearly distinguished the four orders of men (or even five, counting mere foreigners) who dwell in our town, of which two only compose the Republic. No other French writer, to my knowledge, has understood the real meaning of the word citizen.']

Some of the many difficulties of the real meaning of are discussed in W.L. Newman, *The Politics of Aristotle With an Introduction, Two Prefatory Essays and Notes Critical and Explanatory*, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1887–1902), i. 36–44. It is clear that to translate it 'city', in the present meaning of the word, is not short of absurd. 'A sundered and scattered citizen-body, like that of Rome, would not be to Aristotle a citizen-body at all.' (p. 38). 'Aristotle assumes, in the very first sentence of the *Politics*, that the State is a .' (p. 41). All this goes to show that we cannot remind ourselves too frequently of the first rule of Moritz Haupt for interpreting the classics,—'*Man soll nicht übersetzen*.' ['Do not translate': see the essay on 'Moritz Haupt' in R.L. Nettleship, *Lectures and Essays on Subjects Connected with Latin Literature and Scholarship* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1885), pp. 1–22, at 19.]

none of these meanings are superfluous, for each expresses a definite event in thought—either a more or a less intense experience, or the application of an idea to a variety of circumstances. An instance of the first is found in the word 'happiness'. Each man has his own meaning, but that some meanings are truer than others few have any doubt, the question is, Which? Of the second, the meanings of the word 'real' afford an example. We need but take two. When a lawyer uses the word in the phrase 'real property' its meaning has little in common with that which philosophy gives to it.[11] It is a conception applied, or partially applied, to more than one set of circumstances, and with each application bearing a different meaning. In some words, those, for instance, expressing states of experience, we may distinguish, as well as a variety of different meanings, a kind of average meaning for which it stands in ordinary life and which a man might be expected to imply in ordinary conversation. And since this is an average meaning it represents an average experience, or rather an average intensity and fullness of experience. Faced with these facts, our task is to enquire whether there be such a thing as a best and truest meaning which should take priority over these many and variant meanings, and if so, how we are to come at it. It would seem that the best meaning is that which embodies the fullest measure of the experience at which all these lesser meanings—even the technical ones—hint; but it is a matter which we must leave to discussion later on.

When we start to think about this subject, political philosophy, we find that, in its terminology, the past moulds our thought and guides it until we begin to lose our power of initiation. The appalling force of habit is exhibited to us, and our own mental impotence. And yet to cut ourselves off from the terminology of the past were to impoverish our thought still more effectually. We

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[11] Harold Monro's poem 'Real Property' is an interesting commentary on this point. [H. Monro, *Collected Poems*, ed. A. Monro (London: Duckworth & Co. Ltd, 1970 [1933]), pp. 82–3. The poem begins: 'Tell me about that harvest field. / Oh! Fifty acres of living bread. / The colour has painted itself in my heart. / The form is patterned in my head.']

should endeavour rather to recover the actual meanings which lie behind words, to grasp the conceptions themselves, and so, through names, enter into the experience of the past. If we do this, and are successful, we shall be building our philosophy on an experience far greater than can claim origination from ourselves, but at the same time on an experience which we may call our own in the fullest sense, for we have *thought* it. To take the old terminology—'state', 'sovereignty', 'government', and the rest—and to use it without any further attempt to come at its meaning, were nonsensical; but each term, having behind it an event in thought, often a series of events, is the crystallized expression of an experience which we can make our own, and add to, by a critical enquiry into meaning. It is the aim of history to cut away the mere forms of thought until, no matter what change in words is necessary in the explanation, we come to understand exactly what were the experiences of the past. It is the aim of philosophy to test and interrogate these experiences, discover their coherence and logical justification, or to show how they must be changed to make them coherent.

The questions which a preliminary study of political philosophy must ask and answer are such as these:

What is Political Philosophy? What is Society?

What is [M]orality?[12] What is the State?

What is a Community?

What is a Self?

What is Sociability?

What is Government?

What is Law?

There are many questions which we may ask about each of these topics, but the first and the last question which philosophy asks is, What *is* it? But before we can rightly ask this simplest of questions we must make clear to ourselves its exact implication. In short, until we have discussed and come to some conclusion upon the

[12] [Oakeshott has 'morality'.]

true principles of definition we are powerless to proceed with our interrogation. And this, as is clear enough, is a question of the theory of knowledge or, as some prefer, logic. Nothing emerges with more certainty from the history of human thought, even if it were not easily deducible from the nature of things themselves, than the absolute dependence of speculation on ultimate problems upon a theory of knowledge. To put the point in its most abstract form, the theory of theorizing (i.e., the seeing clearly of how to see clearly) must be the first study of any ambitious of coming at a true theory. Ethics, the so-called philosophy of religion, politics, aesthetic, all departments of speculation, depend upon a theory of knowledge. Ultimately all antagonistic theories will be found to diverge on questions of logic.

There are some who, with a certain air of superiority which may best be described as the 'pride of induction', are at pains to point out that they, unlike others, are not guilty of the crime of putting forward a series of definitions at the commencement of a study.[13] Definitions come last, they say. But having enunciated this truth they enter straightway upon a study of the subject itself and from this evolve their 'definitions'. They have however omitted to ask themselves one important question—What is the necessary preliminary study to definition? Every study has its appropriate propaedeutic, and to mistake this is to stumble on the threshold stone, to make a wrong choice in the very thing which is to determine the course of study to the end. The preface to definition is a study of the principles of right definition, not (as some would have it) a collection of statistics. It is a question of logic, not of historical induction. This, then, we must take as our point of departure. And bear in mind that our one object is simply to delineate more clearly the real subject-matter of political philosophy.

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[13] Plato, *Phaedrus*, 263d: 'Alas for Lysias, son of Cephalus' [tr. J. Wright, op. cit., p. 65].

Definition

Systematic thought must have a starting place, and if we understand exactly what it implies, it can have none better than a good definition. The repugnance to definition which is exhibited in many quarters arises from a mistaken notion of what it is, as well as from a right instinct with regard to its extreme difficulty. I shall here confine myself to a few positive statements concerning the principles of right definition; but later, in examining some of the definitions of particular elements of political philosophy, I shall supplement this with a short critical analysis of some of the wrong definitions to be found in the literature of the subject, and the reasons for their inadequacy.[1]

In the first place we must understand (as our study of words should teach us) that definition is primarily a matter of thought and not of language.[2] To define a thing is to see it clearly, to see it as distinct from other things and at the same time to see its exact relationship with other things: for a thing is its relations and activities. It is not less than to 'see it steady and to see it whole'. Words never perfectly correspond to 'real things', and, as I have remarked before, the only way in which we can save ourselves from being deluded by them is by constantly referring them to actuality and reminding ourselves of the frequent difference between the nature of things and its complete expressibility in language. Definition, then, in the sense first of thought and then of language, is a matter both of great practical advantage and of extreme difficulty. It is an advantage for

[1] See note D to Ch. 4 [below, pp. 86–96].

[2] This is seldom, I think, born in mind with sufficient clearness. A failure to do so comes from a lack of definiteness in our view of the nature of words. Like money, they are mere symbols; and to think of definition as primarily a matter of words is to commit the same mistake as to calculate the National Income entirely in terms of money, without any true conception of the real thing behind the symbol. See Goblet D'Alviella, 'Preface' to *The Migration of Symbols* (Westminster: Archibald Constable And Co., 1894), p. 1: 'A symbol might be defined as a representation which does not aim at being a reproduction.'

thought to embark upon a definition because this at once centres the mind upon a particular thing, and what is more, upon the essential nature of a particular thing, and prevents it being led away into vague and useless speculation. It is difficult, because to see the whole of any one thing, to understand it and all its relations and implications, is at once to have achieved a theory of the universe. As Spinoza says, *nihil nos de natura posse intelligere, quin simul cognitionem primae causae sive Dei ampliorem reddamus*.[3] And again, *omnis nostra cognitio et certitudo, quae revera omne dubium tollit, a sola Dei cognitione dependet*.[4] To define a thing, then, is to experience it with the greatest possible degree of definiteness, and to understand all that it means and all that its existence implies; in fact, to be fully conscious of it. But whether it be a finite thing, such as a flower, or an experience, such as dancing, the more we think about it and the more we understand it, we come to look upon it as a part or a mode (that is, a modification) of something larger and more generic. In seeking significance the mind always advances from the part to the whole, from the merely actual to the real.

Sometimes this process of looking at a thing definitely is forced upon us in practical life, but a more common experience is to use, and perhaps enjoy, a thing or an activity without the smallest desire to discover what it really *is*. Thus, we can enjoy a flower, we can plant it in a garden or give it to a friend, without asking ourselves any of these questions. And as for dancing, few among its devotees find it necessary to interrogate their experience in this manner. Nevertheless it would be admitted generally that until we have perceived the thing definitely we cannot be said to know very much about it.

[3] Spinoza, *De intellectus emendatione*, § 92, n. ['On the Improvement of the Understanding', in *The Chief Works of Benedict de Spinoza*, tr. R.H.M. Elwes, 2 vols (London: George Bell and Sons, 1891), ii. 34 n. 2: 'We cannot understand anything of nature without at the same time increasing our knowledge of the first cause, or God.']

[4] Spinoza, *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, Ch. IV [*A Theologico-Political Treatise*, in *Works*, i. 59: 'All our knowledge, and the certainty which removes every doubt, depend solely on the knowledge of God.']

This process of advancing from the part to the whole, from the modification to the thing itself, is none other than the process known as classification. So our original question, How are we to select the best meaning among the variety of meanings presented to us? comes to be, in terms of things rather than words, Is there a best classification, and how are we to select it from the many to which experience introduces us? With the answer to this stands or falls the possibility of definition. A definition, then, is a classification. 'Definition "per genus et differentiam" assigns to a thing its position in a genus relative to other things which are also modifications of the generic nature; and to do this is to *classify* the thing.'[5]

It is true that this is not the most ordinary meaning of definition. In vulgar parlance it often means merely an arbitrary fixing of the meaning of a word for some particular use; but if we again refer ourselves from words to real things—that is, to experiences—we shall see how small is the justification for taking the ordinary meaning to be the true meaning. For 'ordinary meaning' implies 'ordinary experience', which rarely necessitates theoretical accuracy. Our ordinary experience is largely made up of the use of words and things for practical purposes of our own, and this is a process which inevitably restricts and specializes the meaning and reference of both.

We have discovered that to see a thing definitely implies a true classification. But nothing is clearer than that, for various purposes, there are all sorts of classifications, and each in so far as it is efficient, is valuable. Can one sort of classification be said to be truer than another and if so, which? An ordinary dictionary classifies words according to their initial letter in the arbitrary order known as alphabetical. This is convenient for purposes of reference, it is efficient and therefore, for its purpose, wholly justifiable. But it would be nonsensical to contend that this means of classification, of itself, tells us anything valuable about the words themselves. It

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[5] R.L. Nettleship, 'Classification and Definition of Concepts', in *Philosophical Lectures and Remains*, ed. A.C. Bradley and G.R. Benson, 2 vols (London: Macmillan & Co., 1897), i. 212–16, at 215.

tells us something significant for practical purposes, but it does nothing towards unveiling the secret of the origin or meaning or development of language. But if we open Roget's *Thesaurus of English Words and Phrases*, we find a quite other system of classification, in fact one so elaborate that it gives us no guidance at all until we have mastered the synopsis of categories into which he classifies his words. However, having mastered his plan, we cannot deny that the system of classification itself tells us something about the meaning and habits of words. And it would not be difficult to find other etymological dictionaries which achieve this even more effectually. And each carries its justification with its efficiency. How, then, are we to say that any one classification is better than another?

We have seen that a certain number of systems of classification are of such a nature that they may not improperly be called 'classifications for special purposes'. But a nearer view will make it appear not a little difficult to understand how these can be called classifications at all. A classification, like any finite thing, may be used for a variety of purposes, and use for certain purposes cannot be distinguished from abuse. For example, a cricket bat may be used for knocking in the wickets, but its purpose is for hitting the ball; so, a classification may be used for purposes of ease of reference, but such use is indistinguishable from abuse. Special purposes, then, cannot be said to enter into the question; the best classification is that which tells us most about the thing or experience. Thus, it would readily be admitted that a classification of words according to their roots would be better than one according to their initial letters. Or a classification of pictures by their date or painter, better than one according to their weight. Although, we may again insist, that for its own particular purposes a transport office would do well to adhere to the last rather than to the first.

On what grounds have we called one classification better than another? What do we mean when we say that the best classification is that which tells us most about a thing? In what sense can we be said to know more about a picture by an acquaintance with its author or date rather than with its weight? The distinction we have

made, and which it is the business of philosophy to recognize as being ordinarily made and at the same time to press to its logical conclusion and test its coherence, is between the essential qualities, purposes, and conditions of a thing, and those qualities, purposes, and conditions that are merely contingent.

Contingent qualities and purposes are not those which are found in this particular thing and not in that, but those which, though they were common to every finite thing in existence, might still be considered not essential to their being, that is, not intimately descriptive of their real and characteristic nature. All cricket bats will knock in wickets, all chisels will serve as efficient screw-drivers, but these are merely contingent uses or purposes. In the matter of qualities, contingent means 'relatively unimportant'—as, for example, the price paid for an entrance ticket when compared with the actual witnessing of a play of Shakespeare. Circumstances may bring half-a-crown and 'King Lear' into a relation of some sort, but there can be no kind of value-comparison between them; and the fact that a sum of money is invariably brought into relation with a play of Shakespeare every time we see one does not make the importance any the less minute. When Plutarch said that a state might more easily subsist without a geographical site than without belief in the gods, he was not being clever or sentimental, he was telling us about the essential nature of a state as compared with its merely contingent qualities, and telling us something that is true.[6]

It is the radical vice of most modern political philosophy (so far as it exists) that it supposes that the 'constitutive elements of a State consist of a people, a territory and autonomy',[7] thus fixing

[6] [Cp. W.R. Inge, *Outspoken Essays*, 2nd ser. (London: Longmans, Green And Co., 1922), p. 78: 'When Plutarch says that a city might sooner subsist without a geographical site than without belief in the gods, his words would not have appeared strange to his countrymen at any time.']

[7] D. Lioy, *The Philosophy of Right with Special Reference to the Principles and Development of Law*, tr. W. Hastie, 2 vols (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, & Co., Ltd, 1891), ii. 211. There are, of course, a thousand examples in more modern writers expressing a similar belief.

the mind upon what may be common to all states, but what does not give us even the vaguest insight into their real and essential nature. Contingency and essentiality, then, are nothing other than judgments of worth and importance. And all this goes to show the difficulty of a true classification, and consequently of a true definition. *Definitio ut dicatur perfecta, debet intimam essentiam rei explicare, et cave, ne eius loco propria quaedam usurpemus*.[8] And a definition may be said to approximate to perfection the more it tells us about the essential nature of a thing, and the more clearly it distinguishes its value and reality. Again, to see a thing definitely is to see it as part of a whole, or as a mode of a more comprehensive existence; to see a thing completely is to set it in relation with the universe.[9]

Before we leave the subject it may be instructive to look at it from a slightly different angle. Let us ask ourselves, What must we say about a thing in order to define it? It will be admitted that the mere affirmation of existence is not a definition. To say 'The State is the State', or '*a* is *a*', is to say nothing. Such an assertion may imply much; it may imply, for example, that we do not know what *a* is, or even that we hold it impossible for anyone to discover what it is; but the fact remains that we have *said* nothing about it.[10] All

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[8] Spinoza, *De intellectus emendatione*, § 95 [*Works*, ii. 35: 'A definition, if it is to be called perfect, must explain the inmost essence of a thing, and must take care not to substitute for this any of its properties.']

[9] H.H. Joachim, *The Nature of Truth* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906), pp. 166–7: 'A theory of knowledge must rule out as irrelevant *some*—perhaps *most*, but certainly not *all*—of the temporal and finite conditions under which the truth is known. The known truth, as the subject of study in a theory of knowledge, is a concrete universal content, a simple meaning differentiated into many constituent meanings, and emerging in and for many different minds.'

[10] It is appropriate that Shakespeare has put an effort to define a thing in the terms '*a* is *a*' into the mouth of a pedant who is out of any sort of touch with reality, 'the personified *memory* of wisdom no longer actually possessed'. S.T. Coleridge, 'Shakespeare, with Introductory Matter on Poetry, Drama, and the Stage', in *The Literary Remains of Samuel Taylor*

definitions, then, all answers to the question, What is *a*? must be in the form of '*a* is *b*'. But we must go further than this, and ask ourselves what are the necessary characteristics of *b*? Following what we have said, *b* must contain a concept which will link *a* on to a whole more complete than itself. After all, this is the process through which our minds pass (almost instinctively in the more ordinary occurrences of life) when trying to understand anything. It is the process, too, which scientists use in their department for the classification of the phenomena in which they deal.

There is one piece of information which we must always seek when looking at a thing definitely. It has been variously named, but perhaps the words 'purpose' or 'end' describe it most accurately. To see a thing in relation to the whole is to recognize its individual part, its peculiar contribution, the exact nature of that particular modification of the whole. And this is in fact the key to the understanding of its nature. There is no need to quarrel about the possibility or impossibility of there being some one, conscious purpose informing the universe—that is not the question before us. Human things are those we best understand, that is, most completely link on to the whole to which they belong. And our

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Coleridge, ed. H.N. Coleridge, 4 vols (London: William Pickering, 1836–9), ii. 78.

Polonius: Your noble son is mad:
Mad I call it; for to define true madness,
What is't, but to be nothing else but mad? [Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act II sc. ii]

There is another important point which I have no space to discuss. Viz, the circumstances in which it is permissible to define a thing in the terms '*a* is *a*' meaning that it is indefinable. Bishop Temple once said that we 'must learn to refuse to define', but it is a dangerous dictum. Once again: to define is to see a thing definitely. Some things, perhaps, cannot be seen definitely, they are necessarily surrounded with a certain vagueness; but what we must refuse to do is to transport that vagueness into a discussion of what are the things we can admit to be indefinable. The laws which govern the judgement, 'this thing is indefinable', are perfectly definite—otherwise the assertion were profitless.

attempts to define things more distant from us are correspondingly less adequate. For instance, it is progressively more difficult to define a house, a garden, and a piece of waste uncultivated land which has never been brought into any close relationship with human life and endeavour.[11] It is comparatively easy to define the Navy League, or a Trade Union, but in other matters we are apt to place ourselves in the position of the man who defined sheep in terms of mutton, if we go at it too hastily. Plato was surely right when he said that it would be a long and godlike labour to explain what the human mind is. Yet the fact remains, things do imply purposes, whether or not they are easy to come at. A house serves a perfectly definite purpose, and one comparatively easy to define because it is so immediately connected with our life, though a full comprehension of its whole purpose would involve more thought than all of us are prepared to give. To define a house in terms other than those of purpose is clearly to define it inadequately. To answer the question, What is a house? in terms other than those of the end it serves is to have mistaken its *propria* for its *intima essentia*. Aristotle, ina passage already alluded to, says, 'things are defined by their working and power, and we ought not to say that they are the same thing when they are no longer the same, but only have the same name.'[12] And this means exactly what I have been intending. That the essential nature of a thing is what reveals itself when we look at it definitely and not through a haze of words and phrases; that it is to be discovered only when we see the thing as a modification of a whole more generic than itself; and that it is to be described in terms of the end and purpose it serves.

An objection, which has never seemed to me to be more than merely captious, to this argument is common enough to call for remark. It is said that to define a thing in terms of its end and purpose is to define it as it should be and not as it is. It is true that many houses have leaky roofs and faulty systems of drainage, but

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[11] Spinoza recognizes that finite things may be defined in terms which may not be used of infinite things.

[12] Aristotle, *Politics*, Bk 1 ch. ii § 13 [tr. B. Jowett].

can it be seriously proposed that we incorporate these possibilities into our definition? A school may be described as a place where boys and girls receive education, and the fact that there are many bad schools where neither boys nor girls receive any education worth the name, does not call in question the accuracy of the description. The proper conclusion to draw is that such and such an institution usurps the name of 'school'. We must define things in terms of their purpose, for this is the only constant expression of their whole and true nature, and the fact that many things are wrongly named or do not always show their whole nature on the surface to satisfy those who limit themselves to a casual glance must not confuse our minds.[13]

There is a second element which has been considered essential to a definite view of a thing. Descartes thought that a thing is seen clearly only when it is seen 'coming into being'. The nature of things, he says, '*est bien plus aisée à concevoir, lorsqu'on les voit naître peu à peu*.'[14] And the same idea is expressed by Spinoza when he says that a definite view of a finite thing (*res creata*) 'must … comprehend the proximate cause'.[15] And it is no easy matter to decide whether this is necessary to definition, and if so, exactly in what sense. But if we leave words and keep a firm hold on things, we shall see that in one sense this necessity of exhibiting the cause of a thing is none other than the necessity of exhibiting its purpose. And so, in that sense at least, it is already included in our first proposition, viz., that a definite view of a thing necessarily comprehends its purpose.

In what sense is it necessary to know and understand the proximate cause of a house in order to see it definitely? A house

[13] Once, in a discussion, a man said to Whewell that he thought a certain statement was true. The Master of Trinity turned upon him and said, 'Do you call that thinking? See Ch. 4, note B [below, p. 81].

[14] [R. Descartes, *Discours de la méthode pour bien conduire sa raison et chercher la verité dans les sciences*, ed. and tr. G. Heffernan (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), p. 66: 'their nature is much easier to conceive of when one sees them coming to be little by little'.]

[15] Spinoza, *De intellectus emendatione*,§ 96 [*Works*, ii. 35].

is the expression of a conscious human need; the consciousness of this need is the crystallization of a long experience; to see a house 'coming into being' is to rehearse that experience in an individual mind. And this surely is in no way distinguishable from seeing more clearly the purpose of the house. In this sense the proximate cause must be shown in the definition; and this demonstrates how large an undertaking would be a definition of something the existence of which is in no apparent direct response to human need. But there is another sense in which this proposition is taken, and a sense which carries with it all manner of wrong-headedness and delusion. It is sometimes imagined that a true definition is contained in a description of the actual thing coming into being. That, for example, to see a house definitely it is necessary to see it in the process of construction and to understand the minutiae of that process. But it is an error than which few are more gross to suppose that a definition is contained in an historical account of the construction or growth of a thing. A schoolmaster may be annoyed with his class because he has tooth-ache, or because he feels himself to be inefficient, but it would be a muddle-headed theorist who imported these historical, efficient causes of a particular occurrence into a definition of annoyance. To do so, in fact, were to reverse the process of definition, and to seek the meaning of the *genus* in the contingent peculiarities of the individual example. In one sense only, then, may we add cause to the complement of the term *b* in our proposition '*a* is *b*'. 'To understand a thing is not to understand what it is made of, or what it looks like, but to understand its living operation; and if we are to understand this, we must, above all, know its end.'[16]

Before we leave this very desultory discussion of the principles of definition there is a further point upon which we must touch. We have examined the necessary nature of the terms *a* and *b* in our proposition '*a* is *b*', but there yet remains the relating term—the word 'is'. It is hardly too much to say that the misuse of this word (together with its plural) is the cause of most of the misunderstanding

[16] Newman, *The Politics of Aristotle*, p. 44.

and delusion in this matter of definition. To indicate the occasions when its use is legitimate and those when it is not, will necessitate traversing again some of the ground already covered, but it will hardly be wasted effort, so great is the confusion in this matter in the literature (especially the contemporary literature) of political philosophy.

Speaking generally we may distinguish three common usages of the word 'is', and two common misusages.

1. The 'is' of identity. Where the subject and predicate are interchangable. E.g., Milton is the author of 'Paradise Lost'.
2. The 'is' of predication. Where the subject and predicate are not interchangable. E.g., 'Paradise Lost' is a book. This may also be described as 'is' meaning 'is a member of'. 'Paradise Lost' is a member of the class of things generically called books.
3. The 'is' which means 'exists'. E.g. 'Paradise Lost' is on the table.

The common misusages of the word are as follows.

1. 'Is' used for 'implies'. E.g., 'Murder is death to the perpetrator'.
2. 'Is' used for 'has the value of'. E.g., 'Two and two are four'.

These are wholly erroneous usages of the word and there is not the smallest justification for their appearance in accurate writing.

The question before us is, Which of the legitimate usages of the word 'is' will be found in a true definition in the form '*a* is *b*'? We may reject the last, the 'is' of existence, as being of an entirely different nature from that required by our purpose; and so we must decide the relationship between the 'is' of predication and the 'is' of identity.

The 'is' of predication, as we have seen, joins a particular thing on to a whole of which it is a modification, and so clearly fulfils some of the conditions of a true definition. But it is clear also that in itself it is open to gross abuse. Can we admit that 'is a book' is a good definition of 'Paradise Lost', and if not, why? It comes to this.

The 'is' of predication is accurate in a definition only when the term *b* possesses a content adequate to the term *a*. 'Paradise Lost'

is a book, but so is *Bradshaw's Railway Guide*. The statement falls short of a definition not through the inadequacy of the meaning of 'is', but through the inappropriate content of the term *b*. The 'is' of predication, then, may be used in a definition. What of the 'is' of identity? A perfect definition would be found to contain the 'is' of identity, for in it the term *b* would be entirely adequate to the term *a*. But this use of the word 'is' will be found more frequently in statements in the form '*a* is *a*' which we have rejected as a form of definition.

I will conclude this section with an illustration of the principles of definition so far as we have been able to come at them. Let us consider the process of mind through which we pass in an attempt to see a box definitely.

1. Only one box is necessary. That is to say, the first step in definition is not to collect specimens of all the boxes in the world. For, given a mind capable of thought, the essential qualities of a box reveal themselves as well in a single instance as in a hundred.[17]

2. A single box is before us; let us first detail its characteristics. It is round, blue, made of card-board, is two inches in diameter and a quarter of an inch deep, it has a lid, it was made in 1902 and is used for pills.

3. Our next task is to distinguish essential nature from contingent circumstances, the *intima essentia* from the *propria*. For, as Hegel says, 'a definition should contain only universal features'.[18] All boxes are not round, but all have *shape*. All are not blue, but all have *colour*. All are not of card-board, but all have *substance*. All are not two inches in diameter, but all have *size*. All are not made in 1902, but all have *date*. All are not for pills, but all have *purpose*. And so on.

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[17] Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Bk 10 ch. ix: 'If a man does wish to become master of an art or science he must go to the universal, and come to know it as well as possible; for, as we have said, it is with this that the sciences are concerned.' [tr. W.D. Ross.]

[18] Hegel, 'Introduction' to *The Philosophy of Right*, §2, n., p. 3.

4. We may note, however, that in abstracting these qualities we have not discovered the essential qualities of the box. We have found some of the qualities *common* to all boxes, but that does not make them any more essential or any less contingent. For, again, contingent does not mean 'found merely in some examples and not others', but is a judgment of value.

5. We should observe that *purpose* is as much a particular quality of a particular box as is shape or size. And so in selecting it as the basis of all definition we do not preclude ourselves from erroneous judgments as to the real purpose of this or that thing.

6. But consideration shows that a definition must be in terms of purpose or end because it is through this that we judge of the essentiality of all other qualities. A judgment of purpose underlies all our judgments as to the value in a definition of the true nature of a box, of its other qualities. Purpose is that through which we come to see anything definitely. It is a judgment of this nature which leads us to pronounce 'is a book' an inadequate definition of 'Paradise Lost', and to decide that date and author are more important than size and weight in the case of a painting.

I am well aware that all this is very elementary. The argument is often laboured, and the points insisted upon are trite. But to any acquainted with the present position of political philosophy these defects will not appear so great. Our most pressing need at the present time is to reexamine those presuppositions which writers on politics have so long been content to make and leave unquestioned. It is delusions upon these very points which vitiate so many of our present attempts to think clearly on this subject.

Political Philosophy

It would seem that the first thing to do when embarking upon a study is to gain a clear and exact view of the subject-matter, and of the appropriate method in which to treat it. And yet it is a matter of the commonest occurrence for students of this subject to give not a moment's thought to these preliminary questions. The two words, Political Philosophy, indicate at once a particular subject-matter and a particular method of treatment: and we must examine each separately in order to discover its true meaning.

For a particular subject-matter may be treated in many ways—the stars may be studied both by astrologers and by astronomers—and it is of the utmost importance that we have a clear idea of what philosophy proposes as the purpose and method of its study.

In the phrase 'political philosophy' there can be but one meaning of the word 'political' which makes it coherent. Political philosophy is simply the philosophy of political life. Here, then, we may make a beginning and ask ourselves, What is political life?

In answering this question we should bear in mind our previous conclusions. We must think in terms of real things and not in terms of their verbal partial equivalents. Nor must we be content with an ordinary meaning, which represents our ordinary experience, but seek for the meaning which most abstracts the thing itself from its merely contingent qualities. Some have made a practice of commencing their discussions of words with a reference to their etymological meaning. Aristotle, for instance, often indulges in rather dubious etymological speculation, and Ruskin also. But we must understand that in a true definition of meaning, etymology holds the place only of a good analogy—which often exhibits truth, but proves nothing. The legal and commercial definition of port wine is that it must come from Oporto, and this, too, is clear from the etymology of the word;—but a connoisseur would not take this as a good definition. He would say, 'Do you call that *port*?'[1] He must think and speak of it in terms of age and flavour and bouquet

[1] See note on p. 52, above.

and take notice of its origin only in so far as it enlightens him on these matters of quality. Etymology tells us what the word has meant, gives us a glimpse of the most primitive form of the experience it is supposed to represent, but often leaves us without any hint as to the mature experience and fuller meaning which has passed into it. The word 'spirit' affords a good example. That the words 'God is a spirit' did not, and could not contain their modern meaning when the author of St. John's Gospel wrote them is an historical fact. Etymologically 'spirit' means no more than 'wind', 'moving air', but actually, to-day it has caught up into itself so immense a part of the deepest human experience that it were difficult to come at the end of all its meanings and implications. And, indeed, each of the modern European languages has been able to appropriate to itself only a part of the whole meaning. The English 'spirit', the German '*Geist*', and the French '*esprit*' each display a different facet of this comprehensive conception. Etymology, then, sometimes exhibits truth, but can never demonstrate it; it is frequently illuminating, yet often misleading.

(i) Etymologically the word 'political' goes back to the Greek . To fifth century Athens political life meant that kind of life which it was the aim of the to foster and preserve, even, some thought, to make possible. We can recognize the characteristics of that life disclosing themselves in the saying of Aristotle that the came into being in order to make human life possible, but exists in an endeavour to foster the 'good life'. And the 'good life' was simply that abundant life which provides for the real desires, aspirations, and needs of men as such. If we wish to discover what this really was we must find out the whole content of this idea of the 'good life'. But before embarking upon any such historical study it will be fitting to pause and ask ourselves what the value of such an enquiry is or may be, to a theory of political life as we know it here and now.

It is a significant fact that much of the most enlightened theoretical treatment of political life in modern times is deeply indebted to the inspiration of Greek speculation. And we must ask ourselves what are the circumstances which would justify the use

made by latter-day theorists of conceptions which originated in the cities of ancient Greece. The Greeks were at pains to point out that they sought their conception of political life by contemplating what appeared to be the real needs of men as men, what the natures of men seemed to demand for their fulfilment. If they succeeded in discovering something so far above the influence of the chances and changes of particular time and place, it is clear that their findings would be of the utmost value to the theorist of political life wherever he is placed and whenever he lives. There are many who have come to believe that this is true of some of the political conceptions of Plato and Aristotle, and to my mind such an attitude needs no apology. 'Even if Greek philosophy is a philosophy of the Greek and for the Greek, yet the Greek was a man, and his city was a State; and the theory of the Greek and his is, in all *58 Michael Oakeshott: Early Political Writings 1925–30* essentials, a theory of man and the State—a theory which is always true … In studying it we are studying the ideal of our modern States; we are studying a thing which is as much of to-day as of yesterday, because it is, in its essentials, for ever.'[2] But not even so unstinted a recommendation as this can justify us in the hasty application of historical conceptions, whether they originate in Greece or in our own country, to present circumstances. The degree of applicability of such conceptions is strictly in relation to the degree of comprehensiveness with which they have singled out the essentials of the case and abstracted these from the exigencies of particular time and place. So much for the historical aspect of our definition of the word 'political'; to venture further without specialized knowledge were to court disaster without any corresponding possibility of gain, for such a study can in no sense justify any conclusions we may reach. The conclusions of philosophy must rest upon nothing but their own inherent logical value. A theory, as such, stands outside particular circumstances.

But to return to the strict matter in hand. In pursuance of our discussion of the problem of meaning we shall readily conclude

[2] E. Barker, *Greek Political Theory: Plato and his Predecessors* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1918), p. 15.

that, like all other words, 'political' has many meanings both in the past and in the present. Our business, however, is to discover, according to the principles laid down, some meaning which may properly be held superior to all others. Not to step outside that which is well known, it is clear that 'political life' does not mean the same thing to Plato, Aristotle, Dante, or Spinoza as to a modern parliamentarian or the Proportional Representation Society. Indeed, there are innumerable meanings, ranging from such as contain so minute a degree of experience that they may be called 'untrue', to those which, in virtue of their comprehensiveness, may, for human purposes, be taken to approximate nearly to the truth. Between the newly enfranchised voter filled with the sensation of unlimited power of combative opinion, and the poet who understands all friendship and human association not partially but as necessary to the universe and who suffers on behalf of his society that agony or joy which others feel over personal misfortune or success, lies an ocean of political experience of various intensity; and the meaning which expresses most fully and most coherently the highest degree of experience is that which we must call the best and truest.

It is long since the opinion was first voiced that the essence of political life is most conclusively expressed in terms of will; and without entering into a controversial discussion of opposing conceptions, such as that which finds in 'force' the most characteristic feature of political life, and has today many adherents, I shall pass to a consideration of the meaning of the proposition that will, and not force or anything else, expresses the real nature of political life.

There is a theory which regards a scramble for the means of subsistence as the proper and inevitable business of men in primitive societies, and, carrying this conception into more developed conditions, considers the struggle for those products of civilization

which stand above mere necessaries, the proper occupation of men in more advanced stages of social life.[3] The view is adopted because it is thought to be an inevitable conclusion from the plain facts before us all; in reality it is founded upon a perversion of a crude selection from the experience of men. Political life, according to this theory, is nothing else than the most convenient regulation of this struggle, which continues unabated though it may change, from time to time, the object of its striving. That is to say, the essence of political life is regulation and therefore force.[4] The less of it the better will be our social condition, but nothing is more useful for the preservation of 'fair play' than a referee with a strong authority. Stated thus baldly, this theory seems to lose most even of its plausibility, and I shall not stay for criticism, or to point out how it has arisen.[5]

Essentially, political life involves the permanent cessation of this struggle, either for life or luxury, which enables us to enter into a moral relation with men. The egoist, that is the man who through

[3] Cf. 'In all general evolutionary progress the keynote is struggle; struggle of various and several kinds, struggle between species and species, between species and genus, between both species and genus and category, struggle between all of them. There is an intensive struggle going on all the time; and the human race is not and never has been an exception to that general evolutionary rule.' From a Glasgow pamphlet (1921)! [The pamphlet has not been traced but the same passage is quoted without attribution in A.C. Bouquet, *The Christian Religion and its Competitors Today* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1925), p. 18, reviewed by Oakeshott for the *Journal of Theological Studies*, 27 (1926), 440: see *SW*, iii. 40.]

[4] See, for example, B. Russell, *Principles of Social Reconstruction* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1916), pp. 45 ['The essence of the State is that it is the repository of the collective force of its citizens'], 72 ['the purpose of the State [is] merely to exact efficiency and to exact an amicable settlement of disputes'], 75 ['The essential merit of the State is that it prevents the internal use of force by private persons'].

[5] There is a common form of this theory which says that government and law are the primary activities of society which I have discussed fully in Ch. 7, below.

some radical imperfection and poverty of self is unable to enter into any moral relation, sees in men nothing but possible servants of his desires or hinderers of his purposes. His relationship is one of use and not of interest; and good and evil can have no meaning for him. But when we enter a society properly so called we become subject to those sweet and profitable laws of conduct which bring with them such conditions of life as will answer to our real needs and desires. So long as the struggle for life or luxury engages our whole attention we can in no sense be said to participate in a political life. This life begins when we become beings capable of a moral relation, that is when we have learnt

> to curb and spurn
> The tyrant in us; that ignobler self
> Which boasts, not loathes, its likeness to the brute
> And owns no good save ease, no ill save pain,
> No purpose, save its share in that wild war
> In which, through countless ages, living things
> Compete in internecine greed.[6]

The true political life is that which comes into being with the will to rise through the struggle for life and luxury, and to rise, not singly, but as a whole society. It is a life in which mere struggle is displaced by a common will to seek that which gives permanent and common satisfaction. It does not come into being with the will to regulate that struggle, or to change the ends for which men compete in this manner; it is not to be identified with the machinery of regulation and government, nor is this its most characteristic expression. Political philosophy is an attempt to theorize this effort to create a form of life which answers to men's real needs. Different peoples at different times have been varying successful in their attempt to actualize this type of life, but there is implicit as well in every blunder as in every success,[7] the realization that in this direction

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[6] [C. Kingsley, 'Christmas Day', *Poems* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1889), pp. 316–18, at 317.]

[7] This statement, of course, rests upon a presupposition as to the exact relation of truth and error. It is impossible to discuss it here but

only can men find the kind of life which corresponds to their nature. At the root of all political life lies this will to live the 'good life', and if it can be shown that a certain form of life has no trace, implicitly or explicitly, of this will, then we must conclude that it can in no sense be called a 'political' life.

It is the business of political philosophy to theorize the real content of this will to live the 'good life' and to come at some coherent notion of what that life is. To look at the feeble manifestations of this will in history is at once a sad and necessary task, but to imagine, on the one hand, that they are mainly comprised in men's efforts to govern themselves in societies, or, on the other, that because of ill success the will is not real and powerful, is to imagine a lie. The 'good life' cannot easily be described, for a complete picture of it would involve the whole of all that is most real to us in our present life thought out to the end, together with its implications. But we may profitably avoid the elementary errors of those who look for its truest and most characteristic expression in government rather than in friendship, in law rather than in moral sensibility, in ownership and rule rather than in religion and culture. Nor should it be supposed that this 'political life' is a vague, phantasmal creature of the imagination. If it appears vague, that is by reason of its comprehensiveness. The exact nature of the unity of content (if it may be so called) of two empty boxes is easy to determine, but we should not expect an equal definiteness to arise as easily from a first look at a human society or a human self. Nevertheless, when it comes to thinking things out to the end, it will be found that only comprehensiveness will secure us from vagueness, for that only can

it is one more piece of evidence that any theory of politics or anything else rests finally upon a logic. A saying of Theodore Golobensky seems to me to state the case as I see it: 'Cicero maintains that there is no system of philosophy which is not based upon some fundamental absurdity. I maintain, on the other hand, that there is no widely propagated error which is not based on some fundamental truth. See the point of view from which any error has arisen. Then and then only, will you understand it.' See A.P. Stanley, *Lectures on the History of the Eastern Church* (London: John Murray, 1861), p. 491.

be called definite in a true sense which is a real whole. And human societies, looked at only from the point of view of their government, can in no sense be spoken of as wholes.

I am aware that what I have said gives no more than a hint of the full meaning of 'political life', but for the present it must suffice. Our next task is to discuss the exact meaning of the word philosophy, that is, to discover the method and end of our treatment of that class of fact and experience we call 'political'.

(ii) There are in general two ways in which we may study so-called 'facts'. The one we may call the historical method, the other the method of philosophy. And we shall best understand the exact aim of the philosophical method if we can see how it differs from the historical.

(a) History postulates that at some time and in some place certain events happened, and then endeavours to discover how these events took place, why they took place (that is, their proximate cause), and what was the effect of their having taken place. The first thing to notice is that its sphere of study is strictly limited—limited in extent and limited in depth. That is, history does not enquire into causes other than proximate. It may, indeed, attribute certain events to the general laws of which is called 'human nature', but it does not venture away from the immediate field of recorded human experience in the actual world. History is not required to pronounce upon questions of metaphysics; its events take place within the closed circle of the actual world, and it does not affect its conclusions whether we believe that all events take place in pursuance of the will of God or that there is no supreme being to exert such a will.[8] The reason for this is that history does not concern itself with the *meaning* of events, except their proximate meaning as expressed in terms of subsequent events. It moves in a self-restricted sphere of cause and effect. It is the study of the origin and development of a certain class of facts and experiences which it postulates as in themselves more or less self-evident.

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[8] [Oakeshott's marginal note: 'Is not (e.g.) the Incarnation an insoluble contradiction?']

It will readily be seen that, with a slight change with regard to the class of facts concerned, this is the procedure which has come to be called the Scientific Method. Natural Science seeks to elucidate the origin and development of certain phenomena. It expresses its conclusions in terms of fact, like history, leaving out of account any question of meaning in the wider sense. To Science, as to history, facts unquestionably exist; both start their research and end it with 'facts'. And this is to be gathered not only from an observation of the actual procedure of science and history, but may also be deduced from the fact that their method is not logically warranted to produce any other result. '*Une recherche d'ordre scientifique … n'amènera jamais qu'une découverte du même ordre*'.[9]

Nor can either science or history be regarded as telling us, or attempting to tell us, anything significant for the whole of time, or the whole of space. However wide the discoveries of science may extend, however comprehensive its theories may become, it neither pretends, nor can ever pretend, to furnish us with anything but facts referring to what has happened in a limited space and time; a scientific law, theory, or principle never describes more than a particular sequence of physical events which, in all actual cases, is accompanied by other percepts or events in relation to which the law has no application.[10] In the same way, from history we can infer only what has been at one time and in one place. And if it is said that the greater historians have rarely been content with this view of things, but have made repeated attempts to link events on to some cosmological plan, the reply will be that a Thucydides, a Gibbon, a Ranke, or an Acton has rarely been content to be nothing but an historian. While a Huxley, a Maxwell, or a Poincaré is never content with being nothing but a scientist.

In like case is psychology, which, whether or not it may be considered to have satisfied the exacting demands of scientific

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[9] A. France, *L'étui de nacre* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1892), p. 135.

[10] See E.W. Hobson, *The Domain of Natural Science: The Gifford Lectures Delivered in the University of Aberdeen in 1921 and 1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1923), pp. 26–40.

accuracy, can never be considered anything other than a study in the same category as science or history; that is, a study of origin and development. It is either a science or a pseudo-science. The psychologist is a looker-on from the outside, not interested with the contents of the mind for its own sake, but in its origin, laws of action, and machinery. He makes no judgment of meaning or value, and his conclusions cannot be taken as in any way contributing to as confirming, or as criticizing, judgments of meaning and value.

There has grown up of late years a vast literature on a subject which has come to be called the 'Science of Social Psychology'. Its aim is to study and record the 'facts' of social life. 'The science of social psychology aims at discovering and arranging the knowledge which will enable us to forecast, and therefore to influence, the conduct of large numbers of human beings organised in societies.'[11] 'Our chief avenue to the formulation of an adequate science of social psychology lies in the observation of social conduct.'[12] These are two statements, of a thousand, which go to show the exact scope of the study. It is impossible to go into a deeper examination of its method or results, and for our purpose unnecessary. All our emphasis must go to pointing out that the method used is a scientific or historical method, that facts are studied and questioned only as to their origin development, that upon this it may be possible to build up a science of social relations, but it will be for ever impossible to construct a philosophy of any sort or kind, and that its conclusions are in no sense a true starting point for either the construction or the criticism of a philosophy of political life.

As there are many branches of philosophy, but one characteristic aim and method, so there are many sciences whose diversity consists not in a disparity of method but in a difference of subject-matter. It is fitting to say a word here about another of these sciences, because, like social psychology, its relation to political philosophy is not

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[11] G. Wallas, *The Great Society: A Psychological Analysis* (London: Macmillan, 1914), p. 21.

[12] W.H. Rivers, *Psychology and Politics and Other Essays* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1923), p. 7.

seldom mistaken. Political Economy is a science. As such, it sets out to ask the question, How? with regard to certain, limited activities of human societies. It asks, how, for the production and distribution of wealth, are societies organized? As a science, also, it professedly deals, not with particular instances, but with averages;[13] it never comprehends more than a small part of any given event or process, and leaves out of account all that has no immediate bearing upon its purposes. And, like chemistry, for example, it may act as a guide to economic development, but in essence is an abstract science of discovery. Lastly, like all scientific studies, it makes no attempt to come at what we have called the best meaning of its terminology, being content (and rightly so) with that which serves and suits its own limited and immediate purposes. We have examined the legal use of the word 'real', and on a level with this we may conveniently place the economic use of the word 'wealth'. 'A country', says Mill, 'would hardly be said to be richer, except by a metaphor, however precious a possession it might have in the genius, the virtues, or the

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[13] It is instructive to bring together these two passages:

(i) J.S. Mill, *Principles of Political Economy with Some of Their Applications to Social Philosophy*, Bk 2 ch. xvi §4, in *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill* (*CW*), ed. J.M. Robson, 33 vols, 1963–91 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965), ii. 422: 'It is not pretended that the facts of any concrete case conform with absolute precision to this or any other scientific principle. We must never forget that the truths of political economy are truths only in the rough: they have the certainty, but not the precision, of exact science. It is not, for example, strictly true that a farmer will cultivate no land, and apply no capital, which returns less than the ordinary profit.'

(ii) Hobson, *The Domain of Natural Science*, p. 29: 'A scientific law is … always, in some greater or lesser degree, abstract, in the sense that it represents only a part of what is in any individual case actually perceived … With the purely individual, Science cannot deal; it operates with the typical, and the type is an abstraction.'

Our notions of what science is have changed since Mill wrote; we can no longer put it on a pedestal as more exact than the 'rough truths of economic science'.

accomplishments of its inhabitants.'[14] It is no finally true meaning, nor one true or human life when taken as a whole, which political economy gives to 'wealth' or any other of its terms. And this, par excellence, is the signature of science.

(b) Turning to philosophy, it may be said that its distinguishing characteristic is to end, and not to commence, with facts. Its whole task is to find the facts. For history and for science facts are self-evident and are the subject-matter of these studies, but for philosophy they are the most puzzling things imaginable, and when they are really discovered its part is played. This has led to much misunderstanding; philosophy has been condemned for not 'sticking to the facts'. But the accusation misinterprets the whole effort, which is to ask and answer the questions, What can rightly be called a fact? What are the full implications of there being such things in the universe?

As experiencing beings, as minds, we may say that life presents us in the first instance with a number of disconnected phenomena (disconnected that is except in matter of time and place). All science, all philosophy, all thought start from these elementary sensations. And about them we may ask a number of different questions. Let us take, for example, the sensations which we call aesthetic. We may be moved to ask, Where do these sensations come from, and how do

[14] J.S. Mill, *Principles of Political Economy*, Bk 1 ch. iii (*CW*), ii. 49. Mill's reservation, 'except by a metaphor', is interesting. It is at this point that Ruskin departs from 'orthodox' political economy, i.e. in unwisely refusing to limit the meaning of 'wealth' in this manner. See J. Ruskin, 'Ad Valorem', in *'Unto This Last': Four Essays on the First Principles of Political Economy* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1862), p. 156: 'There is no wealth but life. Life, including all its powers of love, of joy, and of admiration. That country is the richest which nourishes the greatest number of noble and happy human beings.' Ruskin came nearer to the whole meaning of 'wealth', but failed to criticize Mill and Ricardo on their own ground. The same is true of much of the criticism leveled against Malthus.

Nettleship says somewhere that it is by no means absurd to take the metaphorical meaning of a word as its true meaning.

they come? And in answer, the physiology of sensation has grown up. And there are numberless refinements of these same questions, which lead us from physiology to psychology, and from general psychology to that which explains and illuminates these particular aesthetic sensations. But alongside such questioning as this (though not seldom following after)[15] comes another puzzle to be solved: What are these sensations, that is, What do they mean, and, What are they worth? And to answer this is the proper study of that branch of philosophy called Aesthetic.

The same thing is true of all other human experiences. Life presents us with certain moral sentiments, which, like our aesthetic sensations, are ordinarily chaotic enough; but besides the effort to put an historical order into these sentiments by asking where did they come from and how did they develop, there is the effort to put a logical order into them. And this involves, not the acceptance of the sentiments as they appear in our unexamined experience, but a process of sifting and testing until what remains makes up a single coherent system or whole—an ethic.

So far as their meaning is concerned, we can in no sense say that facts are facts until they have been rigorously scrutinized. The logic of thought seeks always to ally itself to the logic of fact, which admits that when two apparent 'facts' contradict one another, one (at least) is not a fact at all. And, therefore, until we can say of an apparent fact, 'nothing in the universe contradicts the existence in this manner of this fact', we cannot claim to have discovered what the fact is.

But let us look at the matter from another direction. Philosophy is said, by re-thinking experience, to make a theory of the whole. What is a theory? Briefly, to theorize a thing or an experience is to

[15] J. Burnet, *Greek Philosophy: Thales to Plato* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1914), p. 11. But it is often forgotten that all that can be proved is a temporal coincidence and not a logical connection. [Burnet wrote at p. 11 that 'Greek philosophy … is dominated … by … the question … "What is real?" … It is no part of the historian's task to decide whether it is a question that can be answered, but … the rise and progress of the special sciences depended … on its being asked'.]

rehearse it in the mind and in so doing to create it again in such a way that all its *intimae essentiae* stand out, and the implications of its existence become clear. And this, again, is the only way in which a fact may properly be said to be a fact to our minds.[16] To study political philosophy, then, is to take up into our minds the whole complex of apparent fact and experience which meets us as we contemplate life in society and (as is inevitable in any process of thought) abstracting from it that which is most intimately characteristic, learn to see the whole of each fact.[17] In this way only can we come to understand what the fact of political life is and means. So far from it being true that philosophy depends upon the 'facts' which history, science, psychology etc. collect for it, these studies present us with nothing but the raw material of true facts, and so themselves depend, in the fullest sense, upon philosophy. All statements which can possibly be made on any subject whatever have behind them and assume, consciously or unconsciously, a theory of knowledge. The whole notion of science and scientific research and discovery attributes a certain nature to things, assumes a theory of truth. For all purposes of thought and practical life these assumptions must be made, but philosophy alone sets out to examine them for their own sake. Presuppositions which are but half-understood make but a poor foundation for thought. Facts are

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[16] Cf. Spinoza, *De intellectus emendatione*, §69 [*Works*, ii. 25–6: 'As regards that which constitutes the reality of truth, it is certain that a true idea is distinguished from a false one, not so much by its extrinsic object, as by its intrinsic nature.']

[17] Hegel, 'Introduction' to *The Philosophy of Right*, §4, p. 11: 'To make something universal is to think.' Nettleship, 'Lectures on Logic', §1: Thought, Sense, and Imagination, in *Remains*, i. 114: 'All clear thinking is … abstract.'

Hegel, *History of Philosophy*, tr. E.S. Haldane and F.H. Simson, 3 vols (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1894), ii. 29: 'When Plato spoke of tableness and cupness, Diogenes the Cynic answered, "I see a table and a cup, to be sure, but not tableness or cupness". "Right", answered Plato, "for you have eyes wherewith to see the table and the cup, but mind, by which one sees tableness and cupness, you have not."'

not facts until they are seen fully, that is theorized. The existence of political life brings with it certain assumptions—for facts by their existence make assumptions just as much as statements or actions—and until these are examined we cannot come at its meaning.

We are now in a position to see more clearly the exact relation between a scientific and a philosophical theory. They are alike in that they both follow experience and try to relate isolated phenomena to some sort of whole. But they differ fundamentally in their scope. Science gives meaning to phenomena by placing them in an historical, and therefore limited, whole; its theories are confined to reaching the *how* and *when* of 'facts'. When we say that a certain theory in Physics is true, we mean that (among other things) it is true if we assume space to be ofa certain nature. But if space, in the end, proved to contradict itself, then in no real sense could a physical theory be said to be true. A theory of rent, or prices, is true on certain assumptions,[18] and if it were established that these assumptions contradict themselves, the theory must fall to the ground. And it is just these assumptions which philosophy examines. A philosophical theory, on the other hand, seeks to understand the meaning of the phenomena, not in relation to this or that limited temporal or spatial whole, but in relation to the logical whole of the universe, the totality of experience. Its judgments aim at giving a final and real meaning to things by the discovery of their final and real content and value. A value-judgment is final and comprehensive because it is essentially a judgment which relates the particular occurrence to the whole universe, and not merely to a selected part. And if we attribute to science or history the quality of giving meaning and value to things, we must be careful to note that

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[18] J.S. Mill, *Principles of Political Economy*, Bk 2 ch. xvi §4 (*CW*), ii. 422: 'The laws which we are enabled to lay down respecting rents, profits, wages, prices are only true in so far as the persons concerned are free from the influence of any other motives than those arising from the general circumstances of the case, and are guided, as to those, by the ordinary mercantile estimate of profit and loss.'

in so doing we are entirely changing the meaning of the words from that which they possess when attributed to a philosophical theory.

Let us sum up briefly. Political philosophy is not a science, is not a study based upon or akin to psychology, is not an effort to get to know the origin and course of development of certain phenomena, in short, does not ask the question, How? On the contrary, it is an effort to come at the true meaning and implication of the complex thing we call political life, but of which we know very little until we have re-thought it from the beginning. And instead of seeking the causes and antecedents of so-called 'facts', it seeks to discover the facts themselves in their meaning and value. 'Science takes experience as it stands, isolates a portion of it, and subjects that portion to analysis. Philosophy, on the other hand, takes experience as a whole and seeks the conditions of its possibility.'[19] 'The origin of the conception of right falls outside of the science of right.'[20]

The respective province of the psychologist and the philosopher is so often confused that I feel bound to repeat what I have said before. The psychologist is concerned with the form and machinery of the mind, the philosopher with its content as material for the construction of reality. His principles are not psychological laws, but the principles by which reality may be constructed. I know no better statement of the relations of these two studies than that which is to be found in Maguire's *Lectures on Philosophy*.

> The chief point I wish to impress on you is the difference between Philosophy and Psychology. This distinction is so capital, that when it is perceived one may say without exaggeration that there is nothing else to see. It is briefly this: Psychology is the counterpart of Physiology, and deals with the facts of sentience as states of feeling, but always as a branch of the history either of the individual or of the race; while Philosophy treats of the principles

[19] C.F. D'Arcy, *A Short Study of Ethics* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1895), p. 3.

[20] Hegel, 'Introduction' to *Philosophy of Right*, §2, p. 2. Cf. Plato's remarks on this subject, *Phaedrus*, 230a. [Oakeshott may have had in mind Socrates' remark that 'I devote myself … to the study, not of fables, but of my own self', in J. Wright, op. cit., p. 6].

> which this history presupposes—which it is obliged to presuppose, because it cannot explain them, and because without these its own special deliverances can neither be construed nor understood. Psychology is the history of the individual development: Philosophy is the analysis of the principles which underlie Psychology and everything else. Psychology is the history of a process: Philosophy assigns that process its place in the grand Whole.[21]

Perhaps the whole contrast, and so the real nature of a philosophical study, is best brought out by an illustration. Let us take the example of property. This fact can be treated in two ways. The historian (and the ethnologist is never other than an historian) will travel the world over, will ransack the laws of civilizations past and present, will penetrate into the conventions, customs, and morality of South Sea islanders and the inhabitants of Greenland, and will collect (like Westermarck) a vast mass of information about the institution of property in different human societies. He must, before commencing his search, come at a rough definition of what property is, or he would be seeking something he could not recognize if he saw it. But there is no need to say more than that property includes all customs and laws concerning the possession of things in human society—and everyone knows what the verb 'to possess' means. Yet, when even he has finished, when he has accomplished the utmost measure of the task he set himself, when he has won the felicity of the discoverer of the cause—*felix qui rerum potuit cognoscere causas*—there will still be a certain residuum of problems concerning property left untouched.[22] For instance, no historical study can possibly *justify* or *condemn* an institution such as property.

But now it is the philosopher's turn. His task will not necessitate this 'treading of the ancient track' until the primitive springs of the

[21] T. Maguire, *Lectures on Philosophy* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, 1885), p. 106.

[22] Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, VI. 54, as well as Virgil, speaks of the '*ignorantia causarum*' as the source of all unenlightenment, thereby marking himself as a Father of Science, and not of Philosophy. [Virgil, *Georgics*, II. 490: 'Happy is he who knows the causes of things'.]

institution are laid bare. He will ask other questions; and the most important (indeed, including all others) will be, What is property? And when he has come at some conception of its meaning, he will seek its justification, the grounds upon which it can be upheld as an institution coherent and self-justifying. Some conceptions of property will be found quite untenable because, when thought out to the end, they are discovered to deny themselves. Other theories (and a theory, we must never forget, is just a view of a so-called 'fact' in which it is seen as nearly as a whole as possible, and in which it is exhibited with such fullness that we can say, 'That is the *fact* for which we have been seeking') will prove themselves of so partial an application as to be virtually worthless.

Property enters human experience in various forms. There is what is called 'private property'; there is also 'common property'. Of these the philosopher asks himself, not, When did they arise? and What caused them to flourish here and die out there? but, Is this conception of privacy in property really coherent or does it, perhaps, in the end, when seen most fully, defeat itself? If he finds that private property is not a coherent notion, as he well may, the result will be, not an inauguration of the reign of 'Communism', but simply the recognition that 'private' property as it seems to exist does not and cannot conform to its name, that the thing and the name are not concurrent. For the philosopher never desires to change things, but to understand them. Such an attempt to treat this subject in a comprehensively philosophic manner is to be found in Hegel's *Philosophie des Rechts*, §§41–70. It is not, necessarily, an entirely successful attempt, but its value lies in its consistency and fullness, and for these qualities it stands almost alone. Not until every element of our social life receives a like treatment shall we have a political philosophy worth the name.

I have thought it worthwhile to discuss at such length the exact meaning of the word 'philosophy' because there is to-day, in the study of political life, no greater misunderstanding than that which occurs with regard to this point. It is almost true to say that most of the controversies of the last twenty years would never have

taken place if this distinction between science and philosophy had been kept clearly before our minds. And at the same time, our understanding of the history of political writings would be considerably increased if we could bring ourselves to realize that by no means all writing about political life is philosophical in this strict sense. While it would be a difficult task to single out a philosophical work of prime importance which has appeared during these years, the literature of social psychology, ethnology, legal theory, social survey, constitutional history, party politics, to say nothing of numberless reconstructions of society and suggestions for better social organization, bids fair completely to inundate our libraries. Excellent as are many of these works, the sooner we realize that they have contributed nothing at all to political philosophy (they may be said to stand in the same relationship to that study as do books descriptive of the religious beliefs of the Hottentots to serious works on metaphysics) the better it will be for both studies.

I will conclude with a note on the various terminology used to describe our subject of study. There are many titles in common use—'Political Thought', 'Political Theory', 'Politics', 'Social Philosophy', 'the Theory of the State'—all of which, at one time or another, have been used with equivalent meanings. The situation is not very satisfactory. 'Political Thought', for example, may be, and is, used to cover all forms of speculation on political life, from a serious theoretical treatment to the wildest scheme for the reform of the Franchise. 'Politics', again, has at least a double meaning, standing for true political philosophy and at the same time for the actual process and machinery of government. But a few points seem to stand out. In choosing a name to denote this philosophical study it would be well to adhere to some form of the Greek , because the word carries with it the association of all the best thought on the subject. This might lead us to select such a word as 'Politic' (compare, Aesthetic, Ethic) to denote this purely theoretical treatment of political life, but the German association makes this a little difficult. German writers are accustomed to divide political writings into *Politik* and *Staatslehre*, the former implying writings

of a practical or reforming nature which direct their attention to the preservation or the building up of so-called political bodies (Machiavelli's *Prince* is placed in this class), while the latter are philosophical works such as that of Hegel. But even so, I think it might serve to bring some order into the chaotic nomenclature of the study did we adopt this name, 'Politic'. ('Political Philosophy' is already almost irreparably tainted by abuse). At least it would have the supreme advantage of placing the study in the company of its peers—Aesthetic, Ethic, Logic, Metaphysic etc.—so that it could no longer be confused with studies of another colour.

The State

In pursuance of my plan, I shall not attempt (except incidentally) any criticism of other theories of the State, but simply try to work out a definition according to the principles already laid down. We must try to see the state coming into being and to single out its purpose and, in the light of that, its essential qualities. And I may again emphasize the fact that the 'coming into being' which we must visualize is not historical, but logical.

There are many points at which a discussion of this subject might take its departure, and until we have looked at it from all sides our conception will remain inadequate. These numerous avenues of approach may be classified under two heads—(1) those which start from apparent society, and (2) those which start from the apparent individual self. Both these conceptions when taken singly will prove entirely illusory and when we take the logical road to find the State we shall discover that there can be no tarrying or end to our journey until, having traversed both these approaches, we find them to have led us to the same City. In this section I shall essay an approach from the side of society, in a later I shall attempt a similar approach from that of the self, and finally gather up some of the loose ends of the discussion in a resumé.

Like every other noun, 'society' is a word of many special meanings. But we must keep in mind that we are asking ourselves the question, What is it? about a *thing* whose meaning does not change, not a *word* which may not hold the same meaning in two consecutive sentences. First let us follow Spinoza's counsel and fix our minds upon some particular thing until we come to see it with perfect clearness. We will ask, then, What is *a* society? A society implies an association of minds. In no sense can we say that it *is* an association of minds until we have defined the word association, that is, until we have discovered the exact relationship of those minds. Nor can we, except by some vague analogy, apply the word to minds which are not finite or to associations of things without minds of the same nature as ours. For example, it is thought by

some that the most coherent conception of God is to think of Him asa society of spirits. This is perfectly justifiable use of the word, but one in which the whole, definite meaning—as applying to human minds—is partially abandoned. At the other extreme, it is *The State 71* equally wrong to call packs or groups of animals 'societies', for it is making an unjustifiable assumption that these conglomerations of living things are related to one another in the same way as men in societies. 'Society' as applied to a nest of ants is no more justifiable than as applied to a group of pine trees or a bank of blue-bells.

The first thing we may say about any association of human minds is that it brings with it a moral relationship. It might be questioned whether this is so in a definitely commercial association, or one for purposes of sport, but the truth is that for whatever purposes men join together and whatever the cause and origin of their union may be, there exists a moral relationship between them. And this is so no less of associations which (in a slightly different sense) are called immoral. As Plato long ago pointed out, the fact that a band of pirates can be called an association of minds, no matter for what purposes, implies a recognition by them of some moral basis to their society. Men cannot associate with one another without creating a moral relationship.[1] A society then, is an association of minds which exists on a moral basis. Something of the sort appears in Gidding's account, which I choose because it unfolds a little more fully the historical process which goes to make a society. 'In the larger and scientifically important sense, a society is a naturally developing group of conscious beings, in which converse passes into definite relationships that, in the course of time, are wrought into a complex and enduring organization.'[2]

Not only in the more primitive stages of civilization, but in our own day also, we do not always realize the exact implications of

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[1] This is the justification for the statement I shall make later on, that *every* society is an incipient State, i.e., possesses some degree of statehood.

[2] F.H. Giddings, *The Principles of Sociology: An Analysis of the Phenomena of Association and of Social Organization* (London and New York: Macmillan & Co., 1896), p. 5.

entering a society. For associations always mean (whether or not we are conscious of the fact) far more to us than our ostensible reasons for joining them; and are in themselves often far greater, that is, satisfy far deeper and more fundamental needs, than the specialist purposes which they may actually set before themselves. This is so with all societies. And even those which set before themselves some wider aim than commerce, sport or learning—such, for instance, as a self-governing community whose purpose embraces a way of life—do not always impress the whole of their implications upon each member when he first enters them. For what they effect in the lives of their members can never be fully proposed in a prospectus, or entered in a book of rules. We are all 'led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of [our] intention.'[3]

But the reflective member of a society—especially one of this comprehensive kind, but hardly less so in the case of, for example, a social club—is not long before he realizes that this association with others is effecting one of the most important changes in his life. It is changing, modifying, developing (as the case may be) his opinions. His society has undertaken to educate him, whether or not he likes it. And he may either accept the opinions he finds around him, and unconsciously become a member of his society (but a member in a very limited sense only, because his reception of membership is negative rather than positive); or he may, often through opposition, come to understand these opinions and this way of life, and accept them with a clearer consciousness of their meaning. In any case, to think nothing about the opinion of his society (if he be in any sense a member) is to be unconsciously influenced by it. A society then, (any society but some by their circumstances more than others) is a union of minds, and its solidarity (no matter if it exist ostensibly for other purposes) is a solidarity of feeling, opinion, and belief. This is the meaning of association; and a society cannot exist without it, for lacking it, it would fail to be a society.

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[3] A. Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of The Wealth of Nations*, Bk 4 Ch. ii, ed. R.H. Campell, A.S. Skinner, and W.B. Todd, 2 vols (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1976), ii. 456.

I have been speaking so far of societies such as those of which there are numerous examples in the world, and of which we are accustomed to be a member of more than one, perhaps of many. That is to say, they are in no sense mutually exclusive. I have spoken of them, also, as societies which we *join*, and of which we are not members before we have performed an act of joining. Of course, in the true sense of membership, we do not enter such a society immediately on signing the entrance book, but only when we have made ourselves a real part of the association, and when it has effectively entered our lives; nevertheless in the cases discussed there is a conscious act of joining. But there is another type of society which differs somewhat from this. There are societies which we join without being previously consulted as to our willingness to take up membership, from which it is often difficult to withdraw and whose influence over us it is always impossible to eradicate. I mean those societies into which we are born.

One of these is, of course, a family. In some cases, as for example that of a child born into the family of a farmer, completely isolated from ordinary human intercourse in the wilds of America or Australia, it is virtually the only society into which a man is born. But such cases are rare, and most men are born into membership of societies other than their family.[4] Perhaps he is born into a

[4] I am merely viewing the matter as it appears on the surface. Really, of course, it is entirely fallacious to speak of being born into 'only' the society of one's family, unless we have a very clear idea of all that this means. A man born into an isolated family is *always* a member of a race (possessing racial characteristics), and a nation (with a national temperament). Apart from what he may physically inherit from his parents, he comes from his earliest hours under the influence of their moral and religious teaching which itself is founded upon a past experience of incalculable immensity. In the case of an American settler of pronounced Protestant views, it is true to say that his children, though born into an isolated family, are born into a community of experience whose members are (to mention only a few) Bunyan, Luther, St Augustine, St Paul, and the other great figures of Jewish history—the whole wealth of their thought and feeling in so far as it has been assimilated by his society.

community of ten or dozen families isolated on an American cattle ranch. A more common lot is to be born a member of a village, or, if it be in a city of some magnitude, to be born into the society of a certain district. For anyone with the least acquaintance with the facts of life knows the extraordinary solidarity of opinion and belief which exists in villages and districts, and the even more extraordinary difference of opinion and belief existing in districts which abut one another. London is a city of many societies; while the villages of England possess in themselves a great degree of moral unity. Or again, a man may be born into an association of taste (e.g., in Letchworth), of occupation (Commercial Travellers and other most improbable associations have a great moral unity), or of religion, as in the case of a Jew. At all events, it is usual to-day, and was usual before anything like what we call civilization began, to be born into a society the membership of which, whether it is decided by circumstances of geography or by family relationship or by religion or by interest, is more or less defined and limited.

There is no need to prolong this perfectly commonplace account of human experience. It is clear that this society into which a man is born has far more influence upon his opinions, feelings, and moral ideas than any he may join in later years. But there is one point of the utmost importance which requires emphasis. It is said the 'Society is the birthplace of the moral consciousness. The first moral judgments expressed not the private emotions of isolated individuals but emotions which were felt by the community at large. Public indignation is the prototype of moral disapproval and public approval the prototype of moral approbation.'[5] And again, 'Society is the school in which men learn to distinguish between right and wrong.'[6] All of which is very true. But what is this Society? This conception of Society which is no particular society has continuous advertisement in ethnological writings, and the time when we must ask ourselves whether it is coherent is long

[5] E. Westermarck, *The Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas*, 2 vols (London: Macmillan and Co., 1912), ii. 740.

[6] ibid., i. 9.

overdue. According to our account, which is easily verifiable in the experience of every human being ever born on to this planet, the society which is the school where we learn to distinguish right and wrong is a perfectly definite association of minds the membership of which we could even go so far as to name and number if we were pressed to it. It would consist of everyone we have ever met, some being much more important than others, also such persons as we have met with in books, and the authors of books and the painters of pictures themselves. Wordsworth would add to these the 'one impulse from the vernal wood' which

> May teach you more of man,
> Of moral evil and of good,
> Than all the sages can.[7]

while Coleridge will trust himself only to an analogy—

> the mighty majesty
> Of that huge amphitheatre of rich
> And elmy fields, seems like society—
> Conversing with the mind.[8]

But it is a difficult question which we are not called upon to decide.[9] Where then is our grandiose conception of Society? The truth is that, though the idea expresses the fact that there is a kind of unity in the human race, no such thing exists. Society for us and for the purposes of moral life, association, intellectual intercourse, custom, convention, education, and expression of self, is a definite and limited number of minds, and for these purposes no other society exists. Nor can the name society, as we have defined it, be

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[7] [W. Wordsworth, 'The Tables Turned', in W. Wordsworth and S.T. Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*, ed. M. Mason, 2nd edn (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2007), p. 99.]

[8] [S.T. Coleridge, 'Fears in Solitude Written in April 1798, During the Alarm of an Invasion', *Poetical Works*, 2 vols, ed. E.H. Coleridge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912), i. 256–63, at 263.]

[9] The obvious unity of the world for economic 'life' has blinded us to the fact that in matters of the fuller life, of religion, culture, and custom, the nations of the world are as different and 'separate' as ever.

attributed to the vague racial whole with any coherence. For in no sense is it a unity, in no sense is it an association, or even, as a whole, a potential association. Many individuals who have so far been foreigners to me may in the years to come enter my life, become part of my society, but even so the number into whose direct relationship I can come is limited and can never be race-wide. That this is in no sense a moral *limitation* I shall show later on, it must suffice for the present to note the fact.

But there are two senses in which Society seems to be a coherent idea, and these must receive some discussion at this point.

(1). Certain writers of the eighteenth century have put forward a conception of humanity as a 'man who is always learning'. Vico, Herder, and later Mazzini made much of this idea, which perhaps has something in common with the Stoic notion. The great society of Humanity garners every individual effort and achievement into its all-capacious life and while we pass on to the 'undiscovered country', it remains, a collective and continuous being. In a certain sense we may picture some all-inclusive group of minds, the human race, of whose aspirations our longings are a part, from whose desires ours take their meaning, to whose effort our toil is tributary, to whose wisdom our small discoveries are drops in an ever-increasing sea of knowledge, in short, to whose history our lives contribute, but all the intercourse we have with it, the contribution we bring to it and the wisdom we gain from it is through and by means of our definite and limited part which is, therefore, rightly called our society. It is with this society only that we can have any characteristically moral relationship. Perhaps the point is best expressed by saying that though this idea of the unity of all human minds has a considerable metaphysical significance, it has little or none to ethics. At all events our small society is that from which we learn our morality, whether or not we like to think of it as but one copy of a volume in wider circulation.

(2). The second conception is of more considerable importance. We shall have occasion later on to discuss the idea of *the* State and its relationship to *a* state, and we shall find that the idea has

a noticeable significance. This is not the place to anticipate that discussion, but if by Society is meant a conception parallel with that of *the* State, then its coherence can hardly be questioned. But in that case it were better to speak of *the* Society, and not of this vague entity distinguished alone by its initial capital and usually taken as referring to some actual and moral whole in the finite world.[10]

There is yet an element in our society of which I have taken no explicit account, it is what we call its institutions. The self of a society resides in its literature and art—in its culture—but even more in its institutions.[11] For what are these but a people's way of doing things, its manner of ordering its life—religion, language, education, government, war, marriage, down to the domestic manners of eating and drinking? From our first entrance into a society it is through its institutions more than by means of anything else that we enter into its mind. As we enter life we enter a society which consists, in essence, of a vast number of social, that is moral, influences; these come upon us in our intercourse with the members of that society, and in so far as we become true members of that association we are communing with its mind whenever we contemplate its laws, institutions, art, literature, tastes, and

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[10] We may note as a matter of interest that Society has been used, and strangely enough by Hegel, to denote the non-moral agglomeration of men from which it was supposed the State arose. That this conception is wholly baseless both in history and logic, hardly needs arguing. It is thought probable that it is the last legacy of the historical contract theory of the origin of the State. See D.G. Ritchie, *The Principles of State Interference Four Essays on the Political Philosophy of Mr. Herbert Spencer, J.S. Mill, and T.H. Green* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1891), Appendix, Note A. [Ritchie, *Principles*, p. 156, cites J.S. Mann, 'The Distinction between Society and the State', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 1:3 (1888), 92–8, at 95: 'May it be suggested that Hegel's conception of the antithesis [of state and society] is partly reminiscent of the Social Contract, partly due to the circumstances of Germany in his time.']

[11] The distinction is not theoretically valid, though still useful. Shelley's was a true notion that literature, art, and institutions are the various expressions of one creative faculty and of a single social will.

prejudices. This sum of our social experience as it is presented to us is our state.[12] There never was a time in human history when this state did not exist. History can show us a continually changing content to this form, but since man were not man without some such society of experience in which to live, we shall search the dimmest corners of the past in vain for the place and moment when this thing began. It cannot be said to have come into being at any particular date, it is and exists because we need, in order to be ourselves, some unified whole which is or may be morally self-sufficing. But the fact that we must speak of this state as coexistent with man must not lead us to suppose that it issues full-grown from the head of Uranus before ever Cronos and his brood were born. Like everything else it has its rudimentary stages; but even then it was performing the same task as more mature social organizations, though necessarily performing it less efficiently. The cave, the hut, the house, and the palace have a common *raison d'être* and logical origin. Every important movement in human history comes into being for the sake of life, but exists for the sake of a more abundant life.

Before I proceed to discuss this conception of a state more intimately, and 'as such', I must offer a preliminary observation, which is something in the nature of a repetition. The fact that the meaning philosophy gives to a word in no way corresponds to the ordinarily accepted meaning should not prejudice us against it. The word 'state' may well have a different meaning for political philosophy from that which it has, for instance, in law. As I pointed out, it causes no confusion that the word 'real' has two quite distinct meanings, one in philosophy and the other in law, and but small confusion that political economy uses the word 'wealth' with a highly specialized reference, and there is no reason to suppose that any greater confusion would issue from a like discrepancy in the case of the state. At all events, to accept unquestioned the meaning of which international law makes use as the true meaning is an indefensible denial of the possibility of philosophy and has no shred

[12] It is also, as we shall see later on, our state of mind.

of justification, even though it can plead custom in the most of the tracts and opuscula which masquerade under the title of Politics.

So far we have seen our state in the process of coming into being, it now falls to our lot to make an attempt to single out its essential purpose and characteristic qualities. The purpose or end of a state is the 'good life'; and a state, because its purpose is the 'good life', is essentially a cultural unit. Something has already been said on this topic, and although I cannot treat it fully, the statement is not left as a mere isolated assertion, it is concurrent with the whole conception put forward in this essay.

A form of argument against which I particularly wish to guard, for I see no possible justification for it, runs as follows. It is said that a state is not a cultural association of minds because it is impossible to produce a single instance among, say, the 'states' of modern Europe, which answers to this description. In reply, I would beg to make two observations. (1) That, on the face of it, a band of pirates possesses no moral foundation, and yet, as Plato saw, their association is held together in so far as they are just and not in so far as they are unjust. And (2) that an alternative conclusion has been overlooked. Is it not possible to conclude from the data presented to us that these so-called 'states' of modern Europe are not, at least in the full sense of the word, states at all? And this, in fact, is the conclusion to which *The State 77* we must be led; and I shall afford another opportunity to discuss more fully the view of things which lies behind this notion. Prima facie there is no reason whatever for us to admit that all groups of persons called 'states' are properly so called, but we must be on our guard against a too hasty dismissal of the claims of bodies which have little apparent right to the title, for the real purpose is often found under the most unpromising exterior. And, indeed, were we to follow out to the end (as we ought) the theory put forward, we should find good reason for saying that every association of minds, as such, is a reaching out, be it of never so small an extent, towards a perfect State. But when we have decided that 'culture' is the end a state sets before itself—and our reasons for the assertion may be summed by saying that an

association of minds whose purpose is experience of any sort must have its final *raison d'être* in what is widely called culture—we have yet to ask, What is the nature of this association?

In the first place it is not merely the sum number of disconnected influences. This 'whole' of social influences which we call our state is a definite, though not exclusive, unit. And the reason why we are forced to say that it is not exclusive is that, in actual life, it rarely achieves more than a small degree of unity. Nevertheless, unity and self-sufficiency are the characteristics of a state.

(1) Apologists for the unity of a state, when hard pressed, have been known to say that, whether or not we can prove a unity of mind or experience, one characteristic of a state is that it has a unity in action. This, of course, is true, but on the whole valueless; for such a unity may (in Bacon's words) 'be founded upon implicit ignorance', and so be a false unity.[13] As Coleridge once remarked, I do not know that a man really agrees with me if he only agrees with my conclusions, for unless it can be shown that the reasons why he agrees with my conclusions are my reasons, we can in no true sense be said to think alike.[14] 'It may, perhaps, be doubted,' wrote McTaggart, 'whether you can get any unity worth preserving by the process immortalized by Mr. Saunders McKaye of first stripping mankind of their clothes, and then proclaiming them brothers "on the gran' fundamental principle o'want o'breeks".'[15] Such a unity of

[13] [Bacon, 'Of Unity in Religion', in *Essays*, p. 69: 'There be also two false peaces or unities: the one, when the peace is grounded but upon an implicit ignorance; for all colors will agree in the dark: the other, when it is pieced up upon a direct admission of contraries in fundamental points.']

[14] [Possibly S.T. Coleridge, 'Moral and Religious Aphorisms' no. 26, in *Aids to Reflection in the Formation of a Manly Character, on the Several Grounds of Prudence, Morality, and Religion: Illustrated by Select Passages from our Elder Divines, especially from Archbishop Leighton* (Burlington: Chauncey Goodrich, 1829), p. 65: 'The Absence of Disputes, and a General Aversion to Religious Controversies, No Proof of True Unanimity'.]

[15] J.C.E. McTaggart, 'The Necessity of Dogma', *International Journal of Ethics*, 5:2 (1895), pp. 147–61, at 160–1. [The character of Saunders

result is no unity at all; for oneness, like all ultimate qualities, can only be attributed by a value judgment which implies a judgment of degree. Ultimately there is only one true form of unity,—that which because of its comprehensiveness excludes the possibility of disunity. In any other circumstances a contradiction may creep in, and the unity be destroyed. Absolute unity exists only coincident with absolute truth, for this alone implies the impossibility of disunity. In the final sense, the universe alone is a whole. *Das Wahre ist das Ganze*.[16] A unity of action may be achieved even at the expense of a real unity of thought, and can in no sense be taken as evidence of, or as contributing to, this deeper unity. When we say that a state is not only a cultural association, but a cultural unit, we mean that it possesses more than a mere unity of action; it must have some degree of unity of purpose. In the history of so-called states this is often hard to discover, and yet the notion of the good life, of will as the basis of political life, assumes and postulates a certain degree of unity of purpose in every actual association. I have not, perhaps, said enough to establish this idea of will as the basis of the state, but it is sufficiently clear that any conception of unity must be coincident with some such idea of will, the two stand or fall together.

(2) I have said, also, that a state is self-sufficing, and by that I do not mean the self-sufficiency (so-called) of isolation. Aristotle said that a state exists because of our need of a self-sufficing society in which to live,[17] and a writer of to-day, that 'the social process is one all-inclusive, Self-sufficing process.'[18] Athens was a good deal more self-sufficing in the sense of isolated than any town or country of modern Europe, but no one living in that city, with its

McKaye, a Scot, appears in Charles Kingley's novel *Alton Locke, Taylor and Poet* (1850).]

[16] G.W.F. Hegel, 'Preface' to *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §20, tr. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), p. 11. ['The True is the Whole'.]

[17] Aristotle, *Politics*, Bk 3 ch. ix ['the state is the union of families and villages in a perfect and self-sufficing life'; tr. Jowett].

[18] M.P. Follett, *The New State Group Organization the Solution of Popular Government* (London: Longmans, Green And Co., 1918), p. 59.

port harbouring the ships of all the world, could have placed this construction upon the words of Aristotle. A state is self-sufficing in the sense of being a self-sufficing organ of experience. No actual state possesses in itself all wisdom, none may claim self-sufficiency in point of content, but all true states must achieve it in point of capacity for experience. And this means that it must be more than an aggregate of persons. A state must have a tradition and common memory of experience, built up into an individual language, art, culture, and social life, so that it can properly be called not a body of persons joined together by ties which time might loose, but a 'working conception of life'[19] which grows and develops, is modified and made more comprehensive, by new experience. Capacity to experience argues a definite content of experience, and the capacity grows with the content. These qualities are implied in the self-sufficiency which must be attributed to a state.

It has become clear in the course of our discussion that 'statehood' is not something which may be attributed to an association of minds on historical grounds, nor on the grounds of a particular type of governmental organization. It is in the nature of a value judgment, a judgment as to the moral and cultural comprehensiveness of an association. And this presents us with a view of things which requires further elucidation. Briefly, we are driven to a conception of degrees of statehood. All human associations, we have seen, whatever their ostensible purpose, qua associations of minds, have in them the elementary grounds of statehood. And this, because (the object of will being necessarily cosmic) all human associations depend and issue from a will to live the 'good life'. And no possible demonstration of repeated failure either fully to visualize the aim or to achieve it in history, can disturb this fact of logic.[20] All associations—or, to

[19] B. Bosanquet, *The Philosophical Theory of the State* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1899), p. 151.

[20] We remember the Spartan ambassador who, being asked in whose name he had come, replied: 'In the name of the State, if I succeed; if I fail, in my own.' [See Plutarch, 'Lycurgus', *Lives*, tr. J. Langhorne and W. Langhorne (London: Ward, Lock & Co., Limited, nd [1898]), pp. 40–1: 'Pisistratidas going with some others, ambassador to the king of Persia's

use Burke's word, all partnerships—do not come into being with the conscious object of fostering the 'good life', and yet, simply because they are partnerships of human minds, they can neither will any lesser purpose without implicitly willing the whole, nor can they exist at all unless they possess the elementary qualities of a moral association. We must, then, attribute to all associations some degree, be it never so slight, of statehood. This may not lead to any radical change in our general attitude towards associations, but it is the object of a theorist to discover the truth about this relationship, and not to give guidance for a practical attitude. Following this, it is clear that the actual degree of statehood we may attribute to this or that association varies with the comprehensiveness of its conscious purposes and the intensity of its social unity. A Friendly Society will possess more of this quality than an association of bandits, and a University than a Friendly Society, but from start to finish it is a matter of degree.

What shall we say about those associations which are commonly called states? We should note, first, that as a rule they will be found the most comprehensive associations of which we have any experience, and therefore it is roughly true to speak of them as states par excellence.[21] This, however, must not blind us to the fact that, since they are finite entities, associations in the process of experiencing, they necessarily possess only a degree of unity and a degree of statehood. Secondly, it becomes clear that a given

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lieutenants, was asked whether they came with a public commission, or on their own account, to which he answered, *If successful, for the public; if unsuccessful, for ourselves*.']

[21] H. Laski, *Studies in the Problem of Sovereignty* (New Haven: Yale University Press; London: Oxford University Press, 1917), p. 15, is prepared to deny this in some instances: 'I should be prepared to argue … that in the England before the war the ideal of the trade-unions was a wider ideal than that which the State had attained, one is tempted to say, desired to attain.' This has an intelligible meaning, but unless State is equated to government it is ridiculous enough. In any case, it has no validity whatever as an argument against the theory of the state I have here put forward.

association (e.g., a European 'state') will not at all times and in all circumstances possess a constant degree of statehood. In times of crisis, when social experience becomes unified above the ordinary intensity, and focused upon a single object, the degree of statehood possessed by an association will be abnormally great. England in August 1914 was more of a state than she was during the great industrial strikes of 1911–1912.

Other circumstances also may affect the degree of statehood which a given association attains. The discussions of Plato, Aristotle, and Rousseau concerning the proper size of a state are by no means beside the mark.[22] For a great state, qua state, is not one which embraces a great population or an extensive territory, but one which achieves a great intensity of social unity. And in this matter we must bear in mind that unity means unity of purpose and will, and not merely unity of action and result. One of the most significant reasons for refusing to attribute an unlimited degree of statehood to those associations which are legally known as states, is that their size is governed by considerations of commerce, mere whim, or by other limited ends, rather than by reference to the good life or the excellence of souls.

This for the present must conclude the general discussion of our view of the nature of the state, that is, the truest meaning we can attach to the thing. But there still remain a few points, which it was not possible to consider in the general argument, requiring special

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[22] Plato, *Laws*, 737 ['The land must be extensive enough to support a given number of people in modest comfort, and not a foot more is needed.'; tr. T.J. Saunders]; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Bk 9 ch. x § 3 ['One cannot have a city with ten people and with 100,000 it would no longer be a city.'; tr. J.A.K. Thomson] and *Politics*, Bk 7 Ch. iv ['Clearly then the best limit of the population of a state is the largest number which suffices for the purposes of life, and can be taken in at a single view.'; tr. B. Jowett]; Rousseau, *Du contrat social*, Bk 2 ch. x ['The right relation... is that the land should suffice for the maintenance of the inhabitants, and that there should be as many inhabitants as the land can maintain.'; tr. G.D.H. Cole].

treatment. With the most important of these I will deal in four notes to this section.

Note A: A State and the State.

The relation between a state as (it is said) experience presents it to us, and the abstract something of which political philosophers speak as *the* State, has evoked much heart-searching and controversy in late years. Political philosophy from its earliest beginnings has agreed to concern itself with something which it has called the State, and the conception is too valuable to be lightly abandoned. Many explanations have been offered. It has been said that the State 'is a brief expression for states qua states'. What does this mean? I have already devoted several pages to the discussion of the nature of a true definition, so my meaning will be clear when I say that *the* State is what a state is 'by definition'. An actual state, so-called, in common with everything else, has features and aspects which are merely contingent to its essential qualities, and attention to these, though necessary for some purposes, invariably obscures the qualities which are most characteristic. To revert to our former example, a house may be an orphanage one week and an hotel the next, but we can think of it qua house, that is, apart from these superficial changes of use. This is what political philosophy does to a state. It will leave unsaid much of what goes to make up this or that 'state' at this or that particular time, but all that it says will be true, and true not only now, but at all times, true for the dimmest past as for the dimmest future. And this, because it refuses to concern itself with any account of its historical evolution or passing changes of form and allegiance, and refuses also to base its arguments on any of these features. Thus, when it is said that the State is the whole of moral and social experience and influence, it means that in essence *my* state is the whole of is the whole of *my* moral and social experience. And it is no valid argument to say (like many) that it is *not*, because when I use the word State that is what I mean by it. The only legitimate means of controverting the position is to prove

that there is no whole to my moral experience. If the same assertion were made and also the State were identified with its government or anything less than the spiritual whole to which we belong, there would be serious grounds for objection, but I venture to do no such thing. To use the word State is to express a belief that there is a whole of social experience and that this whole is of a particular nature.

Note B: The Ideal, the Real and the Actual.

A great deal of confusion has arisen among students of political philosophy in the use of these terms. I have not so far ventured on their use, but I feel that a note on the subject is necessary because I do not see how a complete theory of political life (or anything else) is possible without bringing them in. In political philosophy these terms are used in a double connection; as qualifying the State, and as qualifying the finite will, and it is necessary to say a word on each topic. As with all subjects treated in this essay, the matter before us is one of definition, and we must conform to the principles already laid down. According to the view of the universe here adopted, it is a matter of no great importance where we *start* our effort to see a thing definitely, for to see with perfect definiteness the grossest error is to see the truth. We will start, then, at the popular notion of an ideal. It would be easier to start with something more coherent, but it may help to illuminate what I have called the philosophic method if we start as far away as this from the whole truth. Roughly stated, the popular view of an ideal is that it is something of unimpeachable goodness which now exists only in the imagination of men, and which it may be hoped will exist in the actual world at some future date. If we were thinking of a time other than our own, we might have to change the word 'future' for the word 'past'. And though it is a matter of mere fashion to seek the Golden Age in the past or the future, it is an indication of the incoherence of the whole conception. An ideal is something essentially different from the present state of things. In the minds of some it is a state when

workmen need do no work, when human beings need no longer suffer pain, when roads are no longer rough and steep, in brief, when the sea is no longer wet.[23] Again, an ideal state of things is thought of as a perfect state of things. And popularly perfection may imply anything from a large income earned without toil, to a happy home preserved inviolate without anxiety or effort. Whether or not this is an accurate summary of the popular view of an ideal, is of no very great moment, it is *a* view. And if we approach it rightly, we shall see that even from this incoherent mass the truth may appear; that if we understand the meaning of 'present', it is true that the ideal is not of it; and that if we think 'perfection' out to the end, it is true that the ideal is the perfect.

Under what conditions can the conception of an ideal state of things have any coherent meaning? First, we may say that the notion of an ideal home has a real meaning when, and only when, it is not a 'castle in the air'. That is to say, an ideal relegated to the future is nothing unless it is all of a piece with the real facts of human life and human nature as they now are. Real facts are neither mere sensations, nor isolated phenomena, but coordinated parts of a unified experience. And the real facts of human nature are not contained in your or my opinion of the practical difficulties (sometimes called the 'hard facts') of living, or the qualities we look for in a good churchwarden, but are found only in a true definition of life and human nature which exhibits clearly the *intimae essentiae* of these complex phenomena. So then, an ideal society must grow out of the real nature of man. Just as a merely prima facie view of the self and society leads us to the conclusion that (at least) the self *requires* its society, so the most superficial view of an ideal postulates that it should *grow out of* what is real.

There is an implication of this view which is important enough to require a remark. If it is true that an ideal state of society must, in order to be a coherent notion at all, grow out of the real nature of

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[23] R. Burns, 'My Love is like a Red, Red Rose', *Poetical Works*, ed. J.L. Robertson (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 318: 'And I will love thee still, my dear, / Till a' the seas gang dry.'

human life, those who in their schemes for an ideal society fall short of satisfying these conditions are properly and accurately called not, too ideal, but not ideal enough.[24] A so-called ideal scheme which does not grow out of reality is definitely and finally not ideal at all. There can be no question about this, and it is only the grossest misuse of words which has led us to speak of these baseless, meaningless schemes which have no part or lot with reality, as ideal.

To return to our main subject. Is this all that we can say about an ideal? What is the real meaning and implication of the phrase 'grow out of'? It follows that in only a very limited sense (hereafter to be discussed) can it be said that an ideal is confined to the future, or to the points at which our desires are discrepant with the present state of things. An ideal society, properly so-called, can be none other than an actual, present, society taken at its truest and best. The idea that we have given, on one side a set of facts, and on the other a notion of something in the future, must be abandoned, because it is devoid of meaning. It follows also, that the ideal society, growing out of the real nature of men, can never be severed from reality. Try how we will, the two cannot be held apart. And the conclusions we may draw from this will appear when we have discussed the nature of the real. And finally it follows (as a kind of converse to what we have been saying) that 'nothing can be made into what it is not capable of being.'[25] This means that the ideal not only must

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[24] See Hegel, *History of Philosophy*, ii. 204; E. Zeller, *Plato and the Older Academy*, tr. S.F. Alleyne and A. Goodwin (London: Longmans, Green, And Co., 1876), p. 269 [Zeller wrote at 269 that Plato's 'whole philosophy is from the outset directed far less to the explanation of Becoming, than to the consideration of Being; the concepts hypostatized in the Ideas represent to us primarily that which is permanent in the vicissitude of phenomena, not the causes of that vicissitude.']; Plato, *Republic*, 501a [The philosophical legislator 'will have nothing to do either with individual or State, and will inscribe no laws, until they have either found, or themselves made, a clean surface'; tr. Jowett].

[25] B. Bosanquet, *A History of Aesthetic* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co.; New York: Macmillan & Co., 1892), p. 290, calls this the central principle of idealism.

grow out of the real, but in the fullest sense is contained in the real. Contained in it, not as, historically, the oak tree is contained in the acorn, but as, logically, the game of tennis is contained in the ball called a 'tennis ball'. We have progressed, then, from our initial historical assertion about the relationship of the ideal and the real, to this logical assertion.

But the real man, we have said all along, is man when he is fullest man; man with all the implications of his nature realized. Man, the complex, ill-coordinated phenomenon we meet with daily (in ourselves and in others) is not real in the true sense. He is not real because he is not fully realized. Things, most of them, as we experience them are full of contradictions. Even if these contradictions are not always visible, there is nearly always a state of disunion which admits the possibility of contradiction. But the real, in the fullest sense, can harbour no such contradictions. How can it be said that a body of experience is true, when, if only from its limitations, it contains actual error or admits the possibility of error? And if it is not true, how can it be real? The real, if it is anything, is a coherent whole, it is a unity so unified as to preclude the possibility of disunity. And this is what we have called the truth. The real thing is the thing as it truly exists. The true thing, the thing as it exists in its wholeness, is the real thing.[26] And how does this differ from what we have called the ideal? In no respect whatever. The word Hegel uses for 'wholeness' is 'reasonableness', and if we are content to understand it (and not to abuse it) his assertion that *was vernünftig ist, das ist wirklich; und was wirklich ist, das ist vernünftig*, is not so wide of the mark.[27] Thought out to the end, as we have tried to do, the ideal not only grows out of the real, not only is contained in the real, but *is* the real.

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[26] Cf, Aristotle, *Politics*, Bk 1 ch. ii ( ) ['For what each thing is when fully developed, we call its nature'; tr. Jowett]; Spinoza, *Ethics*, Bk II, df. 6 [*Works*, ii. 83: 'Reality and Perfection I use as synonymous terms.']

[27] Hegel, 'Preface' to *Philosophy of Right*, p. xxvii. ['What is rational is real; and what is real is rational.']

This, however, does not account for the whole of experience. Philosophers have introduced another term to complete the explanation. And they have introduced it, not wantonly, but because it has appeared necessary to describe the facts as they really are. This third term is the Actual. There are few minds so obtuse as not to admit that it is a common experience for the actual to fall short of the wholly true. Even Mr Laski admits this of what he (wrongly) calls the 'state'. The actual seldom is, and therefore need not be, the ideal; that is, the actual and the real differ in some important respects, and we have to ask, What is the relation existing between the two? Briefly and from one point of view only, it is one of imperfection to perfection, of partiality to wholeness. For a true view of this relationship we should remember that to see an error or imperfection whole is to see the truth. The universe is all of a piece, and there can be no such thing as a final and unexplainable anachronism. Experience presents us with actual states of society, these are partial and therefore partially unreal. But from a study of them we may pass from that which is so imperfect as to possess but a small degree of reality to the real thing which possesses its reality 'without measure'. The ideal is latent in the actual, and actual in the real. It is true to say that an ideal is not of the present, if we mean by that to point out the discrepancy of the actual and the ideal, but it is an unwarranted historical assertion to say that the ideal is more of the future than of the present. Essentially it has no concern with this or that place or time.[28]

A great deal of unnecessary fuss has been made in the application of this view of things to volition. It follows from what has been

[28] It has been said that 'no ideal is worth while which does not grow from our actual life.' (Follett, *The New State*, p. 52). To which I should reply: (1) That historically it is quite true that all advance towards perfection must be made by means of a series of actual states, of which the later possess a higher degree of reality than those which went before; but that an imperfect actual state, being in a sense a sub-contrary of the perfect whole, must be said to presuppose the latter, not vice versa; (2) that not only is no ideal worthwhile which has no relation to reality, but that it is not an ideal.

said that a man's real will is not (except he be omniscient) his actual will. And this can only be disputed, either by ignoring the meaning we have attached to the word 'real', or by showing that the whole conception of the universe which has led to this position is false and incoherent. The first is merely inaccurate, and the second is a question of metaphysics and not to be argued by reference to law or constitutional history, or explained by anecdotal psychology.[29] As for the identification of a man's real will with the will of his society, that is a matter for discussion; but until we have made some attempt to answer the question, What is a man? the discussion would be unprofitable.

It is sometimes asked by our empiricists, 'Why do you not theorize the actual?' But this is only the old question, 'Why do you not stick to facts?' put in another form. And to attempt this procedure is to answer the question, What would happen were we to theorize the actual? 'To theorize' means, to see as a whole. The actual is a small part of the whole, or a single aspect of it, which, when taken by itself is, by reason of its incompleteness, both meaningless and comparatively unreal. To see the actual in its wholeness is to see it filled out with all that it implies, supplemented by that which gives it meaning. A man's actual will is a complex of contradictions, but if we theorize it we are inevitably led from this to the real will with its universal content. Philosophers *always* theorize the actual, they have no choice in the matter; but, once again, a theory of the actual can in no sense be achieved short of a consideration of the whole. *Start* where we will, a view of the whole must lead us to what is real. Mr Laski's accusation that philosophers have devoted themselves to the 'analysis of the "pure instance", rather than an analysis of the actual experiments with which history presents us', is meaningless nonsense.[30] Either the 'pure instance' is the 'real thing' to which a

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[29] The first is Mr Hobhouse's method, the second Mr Laski's, and the third that of Mr Graham Wallas.

[30] H. Laski, 'Preface' to *The Foundations of Sovereignty and Other Essays* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1921), p. vi. Mr Barker has tried to state the case in somewhat similar language, though with

comprehensive consideration of 'actual experiments' leads us, or it is a void and meaningless conception.[31]

Note C: A State and a Nation.

Following the previous argument, it will appear that a nation, in so far as it is an association of minds, has in it the elementary grounds of statehood. Some nations achieve a higher degree of this quality than others: each case must be judged on its own merits. As it is, history affords us examples of all possible alternatives. Athens was an association of minds with a very high degree of statehood, but it was not a complete nation, that is to say, there were Greeks who were not Athenians. The Germans are to some extent a single nation, but to suppose that the geographical and governmental area

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his different point of view, in *Political Thought in England from Herbert Spencer to the Present Day* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1915), p. 80. But in my opinion he fails owing to his perpetuation of the meaningless distinction between the real and the ideal. [Barker, *Political Thought*, wrote at p. 80: 'we must take some account of the criticisms which [the idealist school] has to face. First and most obvious is … that it does not deal with things as they are. The State of which it conceives, resting on the free consent and co-operation of the moral will of every citizen, may be laid up in heaven, but it is not established on earth. Such criticism, however, rests on an entire misconception of the method of political theory. Political theory, like ethical theory, is concerned with what may be called the "pure" instance—with the conscience of the good man, and the "general will" of the right State. It assumes the best is the truest, and that the truest is the proper subject of study … There will always be some who will use the lower as the criterion of the higher: there will always be others—and they are not necessarily mistaken—who will use the higher as the criterion of the lower.']

[31] It will have been noted that I have mentioned only the least complex and difficult aspects of the relation between the real and the actual. It is, of course, vital to the conception that we should produce a theory which comprehends the *necessity* for the existence of an actual of this sort. This has hardly been accomplished, for in the end Bradley claimed no more than to have shown that it is not impossible that it should so exist.

which goes by the name of Germany is in any sense a single state, is to suppose something for which the most elementary facts give no warrant at all. While the Jews, possessing (at least until recently) no single geographical domicile, may be said, as a nation, to possess a degree of statehood higher than that of many national associations which have the additional advantage of a single government and geographical site. In the ordinary sense, then, the important, much-debated, historico-scientific question of nationality does not properly enter into our subject of study, and should not enter our discussion. And the juxtaposition of the state and the nation has no meaning whatever.

Note D: Some Definitions of the State.

Most of the attempts to explain the nature of the State which have fallen to my notice possess such logical defects, and are founded upon so superficial a reading of the supposed 'facts' of political life, that some service may be rendered to accurate thinking by an examination of their inherent fallacies. In attempting this, I have no wish to put myself in the position of a judge of the individual merits of the various writers in this field. Few of them have touched the subject without enlightening some corner. Rather, we must cry with Brutus, 'Age thou art sham'd.'[32] For nothing is more striking than the manner in which the peculiar interests and studies of our time—those roughly to be called scientific and occupying themselves with questions of origin and development—are reflected in the views of the State and political life which are offered us on every side by modern writers. History has a dismal tale to tell of the crippling effect of the long-current substitution of pseudo-theoretical speculation for scientific research, and it is only in comparatively recent times that men have been willing to make a habit of preferring an accurate historical or scientific account of the origin or development of a custom, an institution, or a process to an account concocted to meet the demands of their irrational

[32] Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, Act I sc. ii.

presupposition and petty prejudice. But for our own age has been reserved the distinction of elevating into a habit of mind an even more fatal substitution than ever crippled the infant energies of science—that by which a true theoretical treatment of the whole and real nature of a thing is replaced by some anile, though learned, enquiry into its origin and historical development. In our attention to historical details, we have lost our sense of the whole, that is of reality. And all this, and much else, is reflected nowhere more accurately than in the so-called definitions of modern political science.

In the course of reading I have collected some couple of hundred pretending explanations and definitions of the State, the more characteristic of which I now propose to divide into five classes according to the various forms they take, prefacing each division with an account of its particular logical inadequacies. It would be natural to commence with that subtle kind of 'definition', in the form '*a* is *a*', which may be distinguished as verbal, since it substitutes a paraphrase of a word for a definition of a thing, and is often found to be no more than a translation of this word into other (and often more obscure) words. But I have noticed few 'definitions' in exactly this form, the reason for this probably being that the word 'state' is not so easily adapted as some to this kind of manipulation. Whatever we say of it we are liable to say something more than is necessarily inherent in the word itself. Perhaps Bosanquet's merely verbal explanation that '"the State" is a brief expression for "states qua states"' is the nearest approach we have to a statement in this form.[33]

(1) The first class is comprised of those 'definitions' which confuse the real and essential quality of statehood with a particular manifestation. For the true genus, these substitute a particular representative, taking no care to elucidate the characteristic degree and modification which it exhibits. Their fault is that they are too hasty; their judgment is based upon a first look. The most important

[33] B. Bosanquet, *Social and International Ideals Being Studies in Patriotism* (London: Macmillan, 1917), p. 274.

office of thought of any kind is to distinguish the various importance of the peculiarities of particular things, and to contemplate the essence of a thing, as revealed in a true classification, abstracted from its *propria*. Such conceptions as of the latent heat of ice are the result of this kind of abstraction; and why our 'scientific' friends should accept such a notion as commonplace, and yet jib at the idea of a latent quality of statehood in associations to all appearance definitely contradictory of such a supposition is difficult to understand. All that a 'definition' of this class is able to effect is to identify a genus with the most common form of its species—hardly a profitable proceeding.

> 'The State is the embodiment and personification of the national power.'[34]
>
> '*Der Staat ist die politisch organisirte Volksperson eines bestimmten Landes.*'[35]
>
> 'The State [is] the nation in its collective and corporate character, entrusted with stringent powers for the general advantage.'[36]
>
> 'Where there is no political law there is no State. Political law is thus the criterion of the State, and in learning the nature and limits of political laws we are learning the nature and limits of the State.'[37]

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[34] [Oakeshott's reference is to J.K. Bluntschli, *The Theory of the State*, tr. D.G. Ritchie, P.E. Matheson and R. Lodge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1885), p. 493, but this passage has not been traced].

[35] J.K. Bluntschli, *Lehre vom modernen Staat*, 3 vols (Stuttgart: J.G. Cotta'schen Buchhandlung, 1875–6), i. 24. [Quoted in T.E. Holland, *The Elements of Jurisprudence*, 6th edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1893), p. 42, also apparently the source of several of Oakeshott's subsequent definitions.]

[36] M. Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy An Essay in Political and Social Criticism* (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1889), p. 36.

[37] R.M. MacIver, *Community A Sociological Study Being an Attempt to Set out the Nature and Fundamental Laws of Social Life* (London: Macmillan, 1936 [1917]), p. 30.

'By a state I mean a body of people amongst whom government exists with power to enforce internal order, and to direct its military resources in defence or aggression.'[38]

'The Constitution of a State is a collection of rules which determine who are the persons in whom the powers of the State are vested, how their powers are to be exercised, and how the citizens are to be protected against abuse of power.'[39]

'The State springs from the union of a number of tribes under a single head, or of several communities under a capital city. It presupposes a people, a territory and autonomy.'[40]

'The State is the politically organized person of the nation in a particular country.'[41]

'In general terms, then, the state may be defined as a community in which there does exist a common law. It is an association of men, occupying a definite territory, in which a common sense of right issues in general agreement regarding the value of both public and private interests.'[42]

'That moment of the organization of every society, in which it presents itself as independent, dominant, and capable of asserting its own conditions of life by force, forms always a distinct phase in the process of association; and whenever any particular society assumes this form, it appears as the state.'[43]

'*Civitas est coetus perfectus liberorum hominum, juris fruendi et communis utilitatis causa sociatus*.'[44]

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[38] C. Read, *Natural and Social Morals* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1909), p. 168.

[39] T. Raleigh, *Elementary Politics* (London: H. Frowde, 1886), p. 3.

[40] Lioy, *Philosophy of Right*, ii. 76.

[41] ibid., ii. 77.

[42] G.H. Sabine and W.J. Shepard, 'Introduction' to H. Krabbe, *The Modern Idea of the State*, tr. Sabine and Shepard (London and New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1922), p. lxxv.

[43] A. Pulszky, *The Theory of Law and Civil Society* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1887), p. 216.

[44] H. Grotius, *De jure belli ac pacis* [*On the Rights of War and Peace*, Bk 1 ch. i § 14, tr. W. Whewell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

A state is a body of free persons united together for the common benefit, to enjoy peaceably what is their own, and to do justice to others.'[45]

The modern state is 'a body of intellectuals, which is invested with privileges, and which possesses means of the kind called political for defending itself against the attacks made on it by other groups of intellectuals, eager to possess the profits of public employment.'[46]

'The state is not society, it is an historical form of it, as brutal as it is abstract. It was born historically in all countries of the marriage of violence, rapine, pillage, in a word war and conquest.'[47]

'The modern state is clearly visible as a territorial society divided into government and subjects.'[48]

1853), p. 6: 'The State, is a perfect [that is, independent] collection of free men, associated for the sake of enjoying the advantages of *jus*, and for common utility.' The Latin text is quoted in Holland, *Elements*, p. 42.]

[45] US Supreme Court, Chisholm v. Georgia, 2 Dallas, 456. [Quoted in Holland, *Elements*, p. 42.]

[46] G. Sorel, *La décomposition du Marxisme* (Paris: Marcel Rivière, 1910), p. 53. [The translation, possibly by Oakeshott, is of the following passage: '*l'Etat moderne [est] un corps d'Intellectuels qui est investi de privilèges et qui possède des moyens dits politiques pour se défendre contre les attaques que lui livrent d'autres groups d'Intellectuels avides de posséder les profits des emplois publics*.']

[47] M. Bakunin, 'Dieu et l'Etat', *Ouevres*, 6 vols (Paris: P-V Stock, 1895–1913), i. 287. [The translation, possibly by Oakeshott, is of the following passage: '*L'Etat n'est point la société, il n'en est qu'une forme historique aussi brutale qu'abstraite. Il est né historiquement dans tous les pays du mariage de la violence, de la rapine, du pillage, en un mot de la guerre et de la conquête*.']

[48] H. Laski, *Authority in the Modern State* (London: Oxford University Press, 1919), p. 22. (The phrase 'territorial society', if it means anything, implies that the *vis vitae* of a society can be expressed in terms of territory; a most amazing proposition. If, on the other hand, it is thrown in so as to help us identify a state when we see one, it is even more amazing in a pretending definition.)

'*La réunion de toutes les forces particulières forme qu'on appelle l'état politique*.'[49]

> 'We may … define a State as a mass of individuals (fixed, more or less), spread unequally over a fixed and limited territory, naturally welded into a society of which every member is more or less sensitive to and jealous of all attacks upon the life of the society from both without and within; and this society, moreover, is ruled definitely and permanently, and for all imperial purposes, absolutely or constitutionally, by a central government, which, after a certain period of time recognized by all or the majority of its fellow States, has become legitimate.'[50]

(2) The second class of pretending definitions or explanations of the nature of the State consists of those which identify the whole with a particular activity or function (sometimes with the sum of all the apparent functions) which appear as common to all states. The activity usually chosen for this purpose is what we call government. Though the logical errors inherent in this process are of an exceedingly elementary nature, they have laid so firm a hold on modern writers that it were well to go to the trouble of enumerating them. First, even if it were proved up to the hilt that the State is an association of persons possessing a definite governmental organization, it would be the grossest blunder to suppose that states could be identified by choosing out these human associations which possess governments. The proof of an affirmative in one thing (which in this case is never even offered) can by no conceivable logic be taken as the proof of the negative in another; unless, of course, the statement is in the form '*a* is *a*', in which case it would not be a definition. Secondly, this procedure involves the even more egregious logical flaw of *cum hoc, ergo propter hoc*, or the assumption of a logical connection between things where no more than an

[49] Gravina quoted in Montesquieu, *L'esprit des lois avec les notes de l'auteur et un choix d'observations*, Bk 1 ch. iii (Paris: Didot Frères, 1872), p. 7. ['The union of all individual strengths forms what is called the political state', tr. A. Cohler, B.C. Miller, & H.S. Stone.]

[50] H.S. Seal, *On the Nature of State Interference* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1893), p. 66.

historical association (not even causal) can be demonstrated. A building of some kind is common to all the colleges of Cambridge, but it would be absurd to define the *vis vitae* of a college as existing in the fact of this possession. And though it were proved that such a possession was common to all the colleges in all the universities of the world, this would neither increase nor abate in any degree whatever the falsity of the reasoning which identifies the essence of a thing with that which happens to accompany it in certain or all of its manifestations. It is not more wrong to assume, because boots have been found in the sea, that fishes wear them, than to assume that government is the essence of the state. Thirdly, a real definition must consist neither in an account of a single property, activity, or function of the thing to be defined, nor in all its properties, activities, and functions added together, but in an account of its complete nature such that the principle of its possibility is demonstrated, and the informing law of its life explained. Medicine has long since achieved the scientific distinction between a cause and a symptom, but, for all their science, our political thinkers have failed to recognize that what accompanies does not explain, and what causes does not define. As a disease is not properly described by one of its symptoms or by the sum of them, but by the essential condition of the whole body or that part most intimately affected, so a state is not to be defined by a list of its constituent properties, but by a revelation of the law of its life.

It may be noted that these definitions or explanations, when they make use of the form 'the state *is* …' illustrate the first misuse of the word 'is', i.e., 'is' used for 'implies' or 'is sometimes (or always) accompanied by'.

> 'The modern state is … nothing so much as a great public-service corporation.'[51]
>
> 'The state is concerned only with those social relations that express themselves by means of government.'[52]

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[51] Laski, *Foundations of Sovereignty*, p. 109.

[52] Laski, *Authority in the Modern State*, pp. 26–7.

'Suffice it that in general the State is required as the organ of the community for the execution of all purposes for which common force or the common resources are essential.'[53]

'*De Staat ist die Form der geregelten und gesicherten Ausübung der socialen Zwangsgewalt*'[54]

'The prevailing conception of the State in our own day is that of a vast mechanism for controlling and regulating the action of Society.'[55]

'The State we may define in a rough preliminary way, as the institution, or system of institutions, which, in order to secure certain elementary common purposes and conditions of life, unites under a single authority the inhabitants of a clearly marked territorial area. It is the largest and the most powerfully equipped institution within Society.'[56]

'The essence of the State is that it is the repository of the collective force of its citizens … The State is constituted by the combination of all the inhabitants in a certain area using their united force in accordance with the commands of a government.'[57]

'The essential merit of the State is that it prevents the internal use of force by private persons.'[58]

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[53] [Oakeshott's reference is to S. Amos, *The Science of Politics* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, & Co., 1883), p. 53, but this passage has not been traced.]

[54] R. von Jhering, *Der Zweck im Recht*, 2 vols (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1893–8), i. 307. ['The State is the form of the regulated and assured exercise of the compulsory force of Society': quoted in Holland, *Elements*, p. 42.]

[55] S.H. Butcher, *Some Aspects of the Greek Genius* (London and New York: Macmillan & Co., 1891), p. 46.

[56] H.J.W. Hetherington and J.H. Muirhead, *Social Purpose A Contribution to a Philosophy of Civic Society* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1918), p. 225.

[57] Russell, *Principles of Social Reconstruction*, p. 45.

[58] ibid., p. 75.

> 'The *State* is essentially a mere institution designed for protecting all against external attacks and individuals from attacks within its borders.'[59]
>
> 'The State is nothing else than the nation organized for the purpose of government.'[60]
>
> 'The revenue … is the state.'[61]

As currently employed in that department of political science which concerns itself, not with the relations of separate political entities, but with the political composition of society as a whole, 'the word state expresses the abstract idea of government in general, or the governing authority as opposed to the governed, and is thus used by Herbert Spencer in all his discussions of government and society. Louis XIV's "*l'état, c'est moi*", Rousseau's theory of the "*Contrat Social*", and Bastiat's "*donne à l' état le strict nécessaire et garde le reste pour toi,"* all imply this opposition.'[62]

> 'The action of the State, or sovereign power, or government in a civilized community shapes itself into the threefold functions of legislature, judicature and administration.'[63]
>
> The State [*république*] is '*un droit gouvernement de plusieurs mesnages, et de ce qui leur est comun, avec puissance souveraine*.'[64]

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[59] A. Schopenhauer, 'On Jurisprudence and Politics', in *Parerga and Paralipomena*, tr. E.F.J. Payne, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), ii. 241.

[60] J.E.C. Welldon, *The Consecration of the State* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1902), p. 14.

[61] E. Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, in *Works*, ed. H. Rogers, 2 vols (London: Samuel Holdsworth, 1837), i. 467.

[62] Sir Thomas Barclay, 'State', *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th edn, 29 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910–11), xxv. 799.

[63] Anonymous, 'Government', *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, xii. 297.

[64] J. Bodin, *Les six livres de la république*, Bk 1 ch. i, ed. C. Frémont, M-D. Couzinet, and H. Rochais, 6 vols (Paris: Fayard, 1986), i. 27.

'*Ma definition de l'Estat, ou de ce que chez les Latins on appelle Respublica est: que c'est une grande société dont le but est la seureté commune*.'[65]

'The state can require no performance and impose no restraint, can command its subjects in nothing and forbid them in nothing, except on the basis of a legal prescription.'[66]

'The life of the state is crystallized in the form of definite institutions, that is its ordinances have to be incorporated in laws and rules of universal application.'[67]

The State is 'a society living under laws, which define, and maintain against aggression, certain specific rights belonging to individuals as citizens, or to society as a whole.'[68]

'*Civitas nihil aliud est quam hominum multitudo, aliquo societatis vinculo colligata*.'[69]

'*Res publica … coetus multitudinis, juris consensu, et utilitatis communione sociatus* [*est*].'[70]

'*Civitatis haec commodissima videtur definitio, quod sit persona moralis composita, cujus voluntas, ex plurium pactis implicita et*

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[65] G.W. Leibniz, 'Lettres', quoted in P. Janet, *Histoire de la science politique dans ses rapports avec la morale*, 3rd edn, 2 vols, (Paris: Germer Baillière, 1887), ii. 247.

[66] P. Laband, *Das Staatsrecht des deutschen Reichs*, 3 vols (Tübingen: Verlag der H. Laupp'schen Buchhandlung, 1876–82), ii. 173, quoted in Krabbe, *Modern Idea of the State*, p. 1.

[67] L.T. Hobhouse, *Social Evolution and Political Theory: Columbia University Lectures* (New York: Columbia, 1911), p. 186.

[68] R.A. Duff, *Spinoza's Political and Ethical Philosophy* (Glasgow: James Maclehose and Sons, 1903), p. 245.

[69] St Augustine, *De civitate dei*, Bk 15 ch. viii. [*The City of God*, tr. M Dods, 2 vols (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1871), ii. 63: 'a civic community … is nothing else than a multitude of men bound together by some associating tie'. The Latin text is quoted in Holland, *Elements*, p. 41.]

[70] Cicero, *De re publica*, Bk 1§ 39 [*Republic*, tr. N. Rudd (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 19: 'a republic is … a numerous gathering brought together by legal consent and community of interest'. The Latin text is quoted in Holland, *Elements*, p. 41.]

unita, pro voluntate omnium habetur, ut … securitate commune uti possit.'[71]

'[T]he Common-wealth is one Person, of whose Acts a great Multitude, by mutuall Covenants one with another, have made themselves every one the author, to the end he may use the strength and means of them all, as he shall think expedient, for their Peace and Common Defence.'[72]

'The chief purposive organization of civil society is the state, the organization through which the social mind dominates the whole autogenous society, prescribes forms and obligations to all minor purposive associations, and shapes the social composition. Coordinating all activities and relations, the state maintains those conditions under which all its subjects may live "a perfect and self-sufficing life."'[73]

'Every state … recognizes obligations to literature, science, and art, and undertakes to discharge them by supporting universities and such institutions as the French Academy.'[74]

(3) The third class, embracing perhaps the most wholly baseless of all forms of 'definition', is composed of a variety of descriptions of the origin of the so-called empirical state, put forward as definitions of the thing itself. In matters of clear thinking, there is no distinction which must be kept more steadily in mind than that between the causes and antecedents which produce a thing, and the grounds or reasons which justify it and comprehend the possibility of its existence. The first is a purely historical enquiry, the second

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[71] S. Pufendorf, *De jure naturae et gentium* [*Of the Law of Nature and Nations*, Bk 7 ch. ii §13, tr. B. Kennett (Oxford: L. Lichfield, 1703), p. 151: 'the most proper Definition of a Civil State seems to be this, "It is a Compound Moral Person, whose Will, united and tied together by those Covenants which before pass'd amongst the Multitude, is deem'd the Will of All; to the end [of] maintaining the common Peace and Security."']

[72] T. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Bk 2 ch. xvii [Quoted in Holland, *Elements*, p. 42.]

[73] Giddings, *Principles of Sociology*, p. 174. [Giddings quotes Aristotle, *Politics*, Bk 3 ch. ix]

[74] Giddings, *Principles of Sociology*, p. 179.

is within the province of philosophy. I have already discussed the relations of those two studies, and more particularly the relation as exemplified in psychology and metaphysics, and there is no need to repeat the arguments. The reason for the popularity of the confusion which takes an explanation of cause for a true definition is difficult to come at; perhaps it arises from the prevalent vulgar sophism of 'political' speakers, when they try to discredit their opponent by referring to his ancestors and the circumstances of his birth, or from the legally necessary, though metaphysically indefensible, appeal to precedent. It is not easy to choose out passages illustrating this type of logical error, because in most cases it infects whole works and forms a kind of mental assumption of the authors, thus wholly governing their point of view.

> 'If we knew the origin of the State it might be expected to throw some light upon its relations to the individual, upon the antiquity and hereditary and traditionary character of this adaption to others, or upon the difficulty of reconciling its claims with his. If, for example, we knew that the State was always founded upon conquest, this might be thought to explain the irreconcilability of many men to its claims more easily than if it could be shown to have resulted from an agreement, or to have developed from the Family.'[75]

> 'We must ceaselessly remember that the monistic theory of the state was born in an age of crisis and that each period of its revivification has synchronized with some momentous event which has signalized a change in the distribution of political power.'[76]

(It would be difficult to find a statement more egregiously illogical than this. Not only are questions of origin and validity irredeemably confounded, but the *cum hoc, ergo propter hoc* argument is urged with engaging simplicity.)

(4) The fourth class comprises 'definitions' for special purposes which are admitted as such. These are superior to any of those we

[75] Read, *Natural and Social Morals*, p. 167.

[76] Laski, *Foundations of Sovereignty*, p. 233.

have yet examined, in that, though they have no more right than their predecessors to be called definitions, they admit their own limitations and are only definitely false when used for purposes for which they were never intended. The admission of the limited scope of these definitions is sometimes contained in the passage itself, but more often in the nature of the work. A form of definition is justifiable in a work on jurisprudence which is inexcusable in a pretending contribution to the problem of the real and whole nature of the state.

> 'A State can be defined, in legal language, as a territory or territories over which there is a government claiming unlimited authority.'[77]
>
> 'A "State" is a numerous assemblage of human beings, generally occupying a certain territory, amongst whom the will of the majority, or of an ascertainable class of persons, is by the strength of such a majority, or class, made to prevail against any of their number who oppose it.'[78]
>
> 'In constitutional law, the state is the power by which rights are created and maintained, by which the acts and forbearances necessary for their maintenance are habitually enforced.'[79]

(5) In a fifth class I have gathered a number of definitions which, whether or not they achieve the fullness of content and comprehensiveness necessary for a perfect definition, are at least cast in the true form, and reach out towards the law of the state's life, and an explanation of the principle of its possibility.

> 'The State is the name we give to the spiritual whole.'[80]

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[77] A.E. Zimmern, *Nationality & Government With Other War-time Essays* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1918), p. 56.

[78] Holland, *Elements*, p. 40.

[79] W.R. Anson, *The Law and Custom of the Constitution*, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1886–92), i. 2.

[80] [Oakeshott cites Bosanquet, *Philosophical Theory of the State*, p. lvii, but this passage has not been traced.]

'The State is not a number of persons, but a working conception of life.'[81]

'The State is … the operative criticism of all institutions.'[82]

'The State is a moral and intellectual domain.'[83]

'The State is not something arbitrarily made, it does not arise by contract between men, nor by the power of one or more individuals. The state grows like an organism, but not according to the laws, nor for the ends, of mere natural life: it has its foundation in the higher moral tendencies of man, and is a sphere for the realization of moral ideas, it is not a natural, but a moral organism.'[84]

The State [society] is 'a partnership in all science … in all art … in every virtue, and in all perfection.'[85]

'Hegel means by the state, not the machine of government, but all that fulfills, in the actual community, the individual's mind and will.'[86]

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[81] Bosanquet, *Philosophical Theory of the State*, p. 151.

[82] ibid., p. 150–1.

[83] [Attributed by Oakeshott to Friedrich Julius Stahl but not traced.]

[84] G. Waitz, *Gründzuge der Politik* (Kiel: Ernst Homann, 1862), p. 5. [Oakeshott's translation of the following passage, '*Der Staat ist nichts willkürlich Gemachtes, nicht durch Betrag der Menschen, nicht durch Gewalt eines oder einiger Einzelnen entstanden … Der Staat erwächst organisch, als ein Organismus; aber nicht nach den Gesetzen und für die Zwecke des Naturlebens; sondern er ruht auf den höheren sittlichen Unlagen der Menschen, in ihm walten sittliche Ideen: er ist kein natürlicher, ein ethischer Organismus*' , is identical to that in Bluntschli, *Theory of the State*, tr. Ritchie, p. 76 n.]

[85] Burke, *Reflections*, i. 417.

[86] B. Bosanquet, 'Patriotism in the Perfect State', in *The International Crisis in its Ethical and Psychological Aspects Lectures Delivered in February and March 1915 by Eleanor M. Sidgwick Gilbert Murray A.C. Bradley L.P. Jacks G.F. Stout B. Bosanquet Under the Scheme for Imperial Studies in the University of London at Bedford College for Women* (London: Humphrey Milford for Oxford University Press, 1915), pp. 132–54, at p. 133.

'The state is always the great Yes, not the great No.'[87]

'We need not fear the state if we could understand it as the unifying power.'[88]

'The State is Society under its most organized form.'[89]

'The State is the embodiment of concrete freedom.'[90]

'The State is the realized ethical idea or ethical spirit. It is the will which manifests itself, makes itself clear and visible, substantiates itself.'[91]

'The basal principle of the political state is the substantive unity, which is the ideality of its elements.'[92]

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[87] Follett, *The New State*, p. 141.
[88] ibid., p. 314.
[89] W.R. Inge, *Outspoken Essays*, 2nd Ser. (London: Longman's, Green, & Co, 1922), p. 67.
[90] Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §260, p. 248.
[91] ibid., §257, p. 240.
[92] ibid., §275, p. 283.

The Self

As in the case of the State, we must not be surprised to find that the meaning for philosophy of the word 'self' differs from the ordinarily accepted meaning. There is no necessity that makes this so, but we should at least be prepared to find that it is so. For instance, in law and for ordinary purposes of identity my self is considered to be my body. No one can enter my body and act with it. When my body has committed an act, the alternative before the law is, either my *self* committed the act and I am responsible for it, or I was in such a state of mind as relieves me of this responsibility; but in no case can it be conjectured that someone else did it. For law, and for practical purposes, the self and the body are thought of as commensurate. But this gives no warrant at all for assuming it to be a true theoretical definition. What is useful is not necessarily true; in fact, it is often found that in practice theoretical considerations (i.e. consideration of the thing as a whole and for its own sake) are best left unargued.

A great variety of theories has been put forward in definition of self, but I shall make no attempt to discuss them all, or even to refute adequately those which are discussed but not accepted. As heretofore, my aim is constructive and not critical; it is to focus the telescope, and not to examine the features of the landscape for their own sake. It will be found that most theories of self fall into one of two classes. (i) The class which postulates some centre or nucleus behind experience, and calls this self. A kind of thing-in-itself. And (ii) the class which, in some form or other, thinks of self as 'the concrete filling' of the mind. A self is its experiences and activities.

(i) I do not propose to say much in refutation of the theories of the first class. For the most part, they are what have been called 'theories of the first look',[1] because they conform very much to the

[1] See Bosanquet, *Philosophical Theory of the State*, p. 80, and B. Bosanquet, 'Do Finite Individuals Possess a Substantive or an Adjectival Mode of Being', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 18 (1918), 479–506, at 493.

first appearance of things, and in one form or other are found to be at the back of the minds of those who would say that they 'had no theory'. The form of argument which has been most successful against theories of this sort, takes the line that (a) it is impossible to find this 'centre', and (b) even if it were discoverable, it would be so small and characterless a minimum entity that to identify it with the self would be not short of ridiculous.[2]

(ii) In the second class there are four theories which require discussion. But it will be found that three of them, in emphasizing a single aspect of self and its experience, fail to comprehend the whole. (a) It has been seriously contended that a self is its body.[3] But though the body must be considered one of our closest experiences, and as the medium through which, in one way or another, all our experiences come, it is impossible to justify the assumption that it is, itself, anything like the sum of our experiences. It is not, historically, one of our first experiences, and, as we shall see later on, a close inspection will reveal an extreme difficulty in isolating any one thing which may be called a body. (b) Secondly, there is the theory which contends that a self is a kind of constant average mass of experiences. This has been met by the fact that it is impossible to discover any average mass of experiences which does not change constantly. To accept this theory is to make the search for self a hunt after an elusive entity which has the same form for no two consecutive moments. It might also be added that this theory

[2] See F.H. Bradley, A*ppearance and Reality: A Metaphysical Essay* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1893), p. 88. ['It may be suggested that the self is the matter in which I take personal interest … And interest consists mainly, though not wholly, in pain and pleasure. This general view may serve to lead us to a fresh way of taking self; but it obviously promises very little result for metaphysics.']

[3] W. James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (New York: Longman's, Green, & Co., 1912), p. 170 n. ['The individualized self … is a part of the content of the world experienced. The world experienced (otherwise called the "field of consciousness") comes at all times with our body as its centre, centre of vision, centre of action, centre of interest … The word "I", then, is primarily a noun of position.']

condemns a self as an abstraction, for there is nothing more unreal than an average. Averages may have their practical uses; but from the theoretical standpoint they are too full of contradiction to be allowed a separate existence. (c) And thirdly, there is the theory that a self is that in which interest is felt. The truth or falsehood, wholeness or partiality, of this depends entirely upon the meaning we attach to 'interest'. Nettleship, for instance, uses the word so as to include all conscious experience. We have varying degrees of 'interest' in a thing as we experience it more or less fully.[4] In this sense, as we shall see, a self may be roughly thought of as that in which interest is taken. But if 'interest' is used (as in Bradley) as an equivalent for sensational experience, mere feeling, we shall discover that it is an inadequate notion. But instead of arguing about the various theories put forward, and the meanings of words, let us try to build up a conception for ourselves, thinking all the time of the 'real things' which give words their meaning so far as they have any.

It has been truly remarked that 'the fact of one's own existence, *in some sense*, is quite beyond doubt';[5] and the most elementary way of looking at a self is to regard it as a thing among other things. When we have made clear to ourselves its properties qua thing, it will be time enough to consider whether these must be enlarged or modified when it is regarded qua self. The question which presents itself is, What is a thing? At first we are inclined to call a 'thing' that which seems to stand out from its environment with a certain observable degree of self-subsistence and self-containedness, as we say. And this introduces the notion which lies at the base of all theories of the first look, that we may place on one side the 'thing' and on the other its environment. If this is a coherent notion, surely we must be able to decide exactly what is the 'thing' and what is its environment? But often enough, in our commonest experiences, the difference between them does not stand out with that degree of clearness we should desire. If we said, for example, that a plant was what we could take away and put somewhere else, we should be faced

[4] Nettleship, *Remains*, i. 17.

[5] Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, p. 76.

with a double problem. How far is the plant in its present position affecting its 'environment', that is, how far does its environment, for being what it is, depend upon the plant? And, how far does that which is removable in the plant depend, for the continuance of an identical existence, upon its environment? For even if it is possible to remove the plant without removing either soil or air, it is still true that the plant depends upon access to some soil and some air. There are alternative ways of answering these questions, and if they are stated clearly there should be little doubt which is the superior.

(i) We may say that common experience forces us to the conclusion that everything is determined by its relations with other things, and to suppose a 'thing' entirely out of relation is to suppose nothing. A 'thing' out of all relation, is not a thing. Words, even sentences, we know, may mean anything when taken out of their context, and 'may mean anything' is equivalent to meaning nothing. Locke has, perhaps, put this as well as anyone else. 'We are then quite out of the way', he says, 'when we think, that Things contain within themselves the Qualities, that appear to us in them.' And again, 'This is certain, Things, however absolute and entire they seem in themselves, are but Retainers to other parts of Nature, for that which they are most taken notice of by us.'[6] The point is almost too obvious to require emphasis, but its application to the idea of 'environment' should be noted. Environment may always, with varying degrees of accuracy according to our scientific knowledge, be divided into 'things'. If we represent the 'thing' by A, then 'not-A', the whole of the universe excluding A, is made up of a definite number of other things, B, C, D, E etc., some of which may be called the immediate 'environment' of A, but to all of which A stands in some relation. And all that we may say of A, qua thing, is equally true of B, C, D, E etc. Nor does it require great application to see that our knowledge of A is commensurate with our knowledge of 'not-A'. That is, to know one thing perfectly argues an equal knowledge of the whole universe. We may, then,

[6] J. Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Bk 4 ch. vi §11, ed. P.H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 587.

formulate two propositions, both of which are true. (a) A thing depends on its environment. (b) An environment depends upon its 'things'. This is one manner of regarding the problem. The 'thing', we say, is necessarily related to other things with varying degrees of propinquity.

(ii) Now for the alternative. Our first method of approach, as Locke's phraseology makes clear, assumes that the 'thing' is its body. Locke uses the word several times in this passage. 'The Qualities observed in a *Load-stone*, must needs have their Source far beyond the Confines of that body'; and 'we in vain search for that Constitution within the Body of a Fly or an Elephant, upon which depend those Qualities and Powers we observe in them.'[7] And, whether or not we use the word 'body', it is clear enough that the theory depends upon a notion that the thing is in some sense distinguishable from its environment. It admits the fact that the plant, to be itself, must be thought of in relation to its environment, but by 'the plant' it means simply its body. To put the alternative in close juxtaposition; either (a) we must say that the 'thing' is the body, but that we cannot assume that it is self-complete, because it depends entirely upon its relations. That is, many admittedly essential features must be considered as residing outside the 'thing' itself.[8] Or (b) that the 'thing' is the whole, the body and its inseparable environment; and so things themselves are not what they physically appear.

The latter conclusion seems to me unavoidable, for the following reasons. First, the 'thing' must mean 'the whole thing' and not 'part of the thing', and the whole thing (e.g. in the case of the plant) is the body and its environment. Secondly, though it may be desirable to draw the line somewhere between the thing and its environment, there is not the smallest justification (except for practical purposes, which are here entirely inadmissible) for drawing the line between the apparent body and its environment. And thirdly, that it is as empty a delusion to suppose that a 'thing' has

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[7] Locke, loc. cit.

[8] Locke, loc. cit.: 'Their observable Qualities, Actions and Powers are owing to something without them'.

any being (even physical being) or meaning when thought of apart from its 'environment', as to suppose that a word has any definite significance without a context.[9]

Certain conclusions may be drawn from this; and some of them have direct bearing upon the subject in hand. We may say that a complete thing has no environment, for to view a thing as complete is to view it as the universe which it implies. Thinghood is a matter of degree and circumstance. A phrase may be considered a 'thing', in a limited sense, but place it in a sentence and its lesser degree of thinghood is swallowed up in the larger degree possessed by the sentence. The sentence, that is, is nearer to comprehending the universe than the phrase

> Sic ipsis in rebus item iam materiai
> concursus motus ordo positura figurae
> cum permutantur, mutari res quoque debent.[10]

The thingness of a thing is its complete nature, what it is by definition. And since a thing, as we know it, can never, except artificially and for specialized purposes, be separated from its environment, the conception is finally applicable only to that which has a degree of wholeness which we can attribute to the universe alone.

Let us return to the point from which we set out. We have been considering the self qua thing, and we may suppose that, whatever else we may say about the self qua self, we cannot deny its qualities as a thing. The self may be more than a 'mere thing', but it cannot be less.

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[9] The word 'context' as I have used it throughout may, of course, mean merely the adjacent words and phrases, but also that context of thought which *is* meaning.

[10] Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, II. 1020. [Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, tr. J.S. Watson (London: Bohn, 1851), p. 91: 'So likewise even in things themselves, when the intervals, passages, connexions, weights, impulses, collisions, movements, order, position, and configurations of the atoms of matter are interchanged, the things which are formed from them must also be changed'.]

Whatever we may finally discover the self to be, the most obvious way in which it makes an advance on mere thinghood is by its consciousness. The full meaning of consciousness is not easily run to earth, and its implications are so various that I may be excused anything like a full discussion of the topic. But, as we experience it (that is, our consciousness of self), it is largely, if not entirely, social. To say that the self is conscious of itself means, among other things, that it lives in reference to 'other' objects. And our next step must be to discover the exact nature of its relationship to its world, and the method of its reference to it. In this it would seem that we were forced to evacuate our purely theoretical position, and step down on to the at least quasi-scientific ground of psychology. And to a certain extent this is so. But by this, we should understand that we are not 'basing' metaphysics on psychology, but merely taking the phenomena observed by this latter study and making an attempt to ascertain their meaning.[11] For myself, I shall keep within the most elementary and most easily ascertainable 'facts' of observation.

The self has been considered to have three main aspects. The reason why it is impossible to call these aspects 'parts' is obvious; the reason why they cannot all be called 'activities' will appear immediately. These aspects have been variously termed; but the commonest may be tabulated in a manner which shows those that are considered equivalent.

1	2	3
Feeling	Cognition	Volition
Sensation (Discrimination)	Apperception	Will

[11] Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, pp. 76, 120. ['I must [try] to fix some of the meanings in which self is used. And I am forced to trespass inside the limits of psychology; as, indeed, I think is quite necessary in several parts of metaphysics. I do not mean metaphysics is based upon psychology. I am quite convinced that such a foundation is impossible, and that, if attempted, it produces a disastrous hybrid which possesses the merits of neither science'; 'for metaphysics a principle, if it is to stand at all, must stand absolutely by itself.']

Let us briefly examine the nature of each of these classes.

(i) That which we call feeling or sensation is so termed because it cannot properly be dignified with the title of experience. What is the 'real thing' which corresponds to the word feeling? We are all aware, in our efforts to master our world, of a certain marginal experience (there seems no other word for this that is but a shadow) which is not, and perhaps never will be, co-ordinated, made 'part of ourselves' as we say. A man with a great faculty for what is called 'verbal memory' is always in danger of collecting and having ready for certain limited uses, a store of facts the meaning of which has never come home to him. He holds them within his memory, but they are all the time foreign to himself, and unless his faculty of memorizing is exceptional these facts would never present themselves to him in those times of sudden need or deepest emotion, when we act and speak 'out of ourselves' and not merely out of our memories. To put it another way, these vague feelings have never passed from memory into judgment. The simplest example will suffice to illustrate the point. All of us have in memory a certain store of maxims, and while we cannot name the day when we learnt them, the day when we first understood them stands out in clear relief, for it was connected with a real experience. 'A maxim', says Thomas Hardy, 'glibly repeated from childhood remains practically unmarked till some mature experience enforces it.'[12] It is only with painful experience that our first copy-book sentences pass from memory into mind, from sensation into character.

A man who lives by his feelings is usually considered to be capricious, and this is so because there is no ordered experience behind his judgments. He has assimilated his 'knowledge' by mere spontaneous association. It may be definite enough as far as it goes, but it is essentially disordered, lacking any sort of unity, and therefore

[12] [T. Hardy, *The Life and Death of the Mayor of Casterbridge A Story of a Man of Character*, Ch. XXI (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1929), p. 159.]

incomplete. All our knowledge tends to this condition in so far as it is uncertain of the full range of its implications. Sensation, too, is passive, except in the very limited sense in which mere association can be called active. In looking at a picture, for example, we may have a sensation of pleasure or of pain, but this can in no true sense be called an experience, because it is not vitally co-ordinated with the former body of experience which we may have gained in the contemplation of works of art. To feel it we do not need to bring to bear the whole wealth of our past experience; to have felt it is not to have added to that unified body of experience. Until this sensation passes into something more explicit, say an experience of 'greatness' or of 'beauty', it cannot be said to be 'part of ourselves'. Irrationality and passivity, then, are the two prime qualities of sensation. But it is essential that a conscious self should live in active reference to its world. There are no experiences of the self which are not 'activity experiences', and this applies to both cognition and volition. Passivity, clearly, is not a possible state of the self, apart from the hypothetical complete inactivity of unconsciousness. For consciousness implies selection, and selection necessitates a body of co-ordinated experience, as apart from merely marginal sensation which may be held in the memory[13] without acquiring sufficient meaning and significance to be as a part of the self or the mind. We must conclude, then, that if we are to use the expression in any coherent sense, the only real 'aspects of the self' which will bear serious examination are cognition and volition.

(ii) Cognition may be analysed into two parts. (a) The act of reference. And (b) the object. The first is always mental; the second may be either mental or physical. The essence of cognition is the active reference of mind to an object. And in this its difference from mere sensation becomes clear. Our only way of knowing consists in finding a place for new phenomena within the present system of our experience. The content of the memory may be amassed by

[13] Memory is, of course, only a single example. There is besides, the kind of spontaneous memory which different parts of our body acquire by practice, called habits.

a process of entirely irrational association, but the content of the mind is gathered by making new experiences logically coherent with the present body of experience, and vice versa. The mind (when we speak of cognition as an active reference of the mind to an object) can be nothing else but such unity of experience as we are able to bring to bear upon the particular situation, and in consequence it is misleading to speak of cognition as a faculty of the mind. Cognition is the mind as knowing; in each cognitive act the whole mind is engaged. Moreover, since, as we have seen fit to suppose, the universe is a connected system of relations, the true object of all cognition is universal in form.[14] And it is of small moment whether we say that the true object of cognition is always the mind itself ('knowing', thus resolving itself into 'knowing one's own mind'), or that its object is always the universe.

(iii) An examination of volition leads us to a somewhat similar conclusion. Willing is a definite relation of the mind to objects. It is an active relation, and it is a relation of the whole mind to its object. That is to say, the will is the mind as willing. And in the same way, the true object of the will is always universal. Both Plato and Aristotle called this universal, 'the chief good',[15] and a writer of to-day who has entered more nearly than most into the meaning of platonic idealism has described the nature of the will in this eloquent passage:

> I think men ever follow a spiritual light even when they seem to be most turned away from it. When we analyse their desires, even those which seem gross, we find what allures them is some beauty or majesty mirrored in this from a loftier nature. So the lustful man is tormented by an inversion of the holy spirit

[14] See pp. 99–100, above.

[15] Plato, *Republic*, 505e ['no one is satisfied with the appearance of the good—the reality is what they seek.'; tr. B. Jowett]; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Bk 1 ch. i § 1 ['If, then, our activities have some end which we want for its own sake … this must be the Good, that is the supreme good.'; tr. J.A.K. Thomson], and *Politics*, Bk 1 ch. i § 1 ['the state or political community … aims at good in a greater degree than any other, and at the highest good.'; tr. B. Jowett].

> or creative fire. The drunkard thirsts for fulness of being as the God-intoxicated do. Vanity in us is an echo of the consciousness of beauty in the artificer of the cosmos, while hate is the dark descendant of that wisdom which is perpetually regenerating the universe. Even those lost and hopeless who pursue their desires to spiritual death are still seeking spiritual life. They follow a gleam mistakenly as we may imagine light-demented moths dashing themselves at a moon on water. As in their private lusts men still follow something in essence universal, so too in their imaginations about society are they allured by images and shadows of their own hidden divinity.[16]

And, while the true object of volition is universal, 'Self-satisfaction is the form of every object willed.'[17]

It will have been noted that in order to avoid confusion I have used the word 'mind' where 'self' might have been equally admissible. But whatever we call it, we have arrived at the following facts. Its prime characteristic is an active (i.e. conscious) reference to objects, which psychology has analysed into cognition and volition. There are many minor activities included in these two, but we must consider that the whole activity of the self is accurately subsumed under this double heading. At the same time there is a certain air of artificiality about this analysis, because we have found it impossible to admit either cognition or volition to be anything other than the whole self directed towards a universal object. And this presents us with an alternative. We may discover either (i) that one of these acts of the self is in some sense so much more fundamental than the other that it may properly be called the self; or (ii) that the self is

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[16] A.E. [pseud. of George William Russell], *The Interpreters* (London: Macmillan And Co., 1922), pp. 127–8.

[17] T.H. Green, *Prologomena to Ethics*, Bk 3 ch. i §154, 2nd edn, ed. A.C. Bradley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1884), p. 161. If I have not established the general view of the universe on which this notion depends I have at least shown that any adequate treatment of the will or the self must face metaphysical as well as merely psychological problems. And that is my object here.

something which includes both cognition and volition but can be identified with neither.

(i) Let us examine the first of these alternatives. Consideration would lead us to suppose that, if we were forced to choose which is the more fundamental of the self's activities, our choice would fall upon the will. Indeed, it is for the will only that a plausible case can be made. For in a very real sense, at least some form of willing seems to lie behind every act of knowing. The attention required for knowledge assumes something which is not ill-called a 'will to know'. Every epistemology postulates some such primary attitude of mind as this, though it has been described with a various terminology. A concrete example will illustrate this point. I am punished. Primarily this is merely a sensation, and as such has not entered into the realm of self at all. It becomes an experience, in a true sense, if I relate it to myself and gradually co-ordinate it with my present body of experience. Not everyone, however, is willing to do this; and so the first motion in this direction must be one of 'willing to understand'. This is what Ward has called 'that instinct which precedes knowledge and is the chief means of acquiring and increasing it.'[18] Or again, what do we mean by men with an infirmity of will or purpose? Either that they are madmen with no power of direction over their minds, or merely that they choose to direct their will to knowing rather than doing.[19] And if we count a

[18] J. Ward, 'The Christian Ideas of Faith and Eternal Life', *Hibbert Journal*, 23:2 (1925), 193–206, at 193. Coleridge, in 'An Essay on Faith', and many others call it 'faith'. [S.T. Coleridge, 'An Essay on Faith', in *Aids to Reflection and The Confessions of an Inquiring Spiri*t (London: George Bell and Sons, 1904), p. 341: 'Faith may be defined as fidelity to our own being—so far as such being is not and cannot become an object of the senses'.] J. Laird, *Problems of the Self An Essay Based on the Shaw Lectures Given in the University of Edinburgh March 1914* (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1917), p. 106, thinks that this initial motion of the mind is better subsumed under cognition than volition ['all conation must be guided by some cognition.']

[19] Hamlet and H.F. Amiel seem good instances of the will (and in both cases it was a will of no mean order) directed towards knowing rather than

man mad, we mean that he cannot, in any usual sense, be called a self; so volition, again, seems the more fundamental activity.

But two considerations intervene, which are calculated to prevent us from coming to the conclusion that the self is will. First, it almost amounts to a confusion of thought to call by the same name this primary motion of the mind towards thought or action, and the true form of willing; that is, to bring together the actions of willing to understand the punishment, and the actual willing of the punishment itself which could only be a result of knowledge. It were better to call this first form of volition by some such name as 'faith', and so avoid the confusion. And secondly, if we take volition and cognition as they really are, there is not the smallest reason for thinking the one in any sense more fundamental than the other. Our alternative must be cast in another form. Either the self is this 'faith', or it is something which includes cognitive and volitional activities but cannot be identified with them. And thus stated, it is clear that by identifying the self with 'faith', we are confusing the whole, basis and superstructure, with that which is merely an element, albeit an important element, in the foundation.

(ii) In abandoning one side of our argument we are forced to take up the other; but we are still far from a definite view of its meaning. The self must be something which includes cognition and volition, but can be identified with neither. We have already seen that these things which we call knowledge and will are really none other than aspects of the self, and so we may sum up the whole of its life (which is simply an active relation to objects) as one of continuous experiencing. The form of experience may vary, but whether it is cognitive or volitional, it is always an active experience. Here then is the heading under which we may subsume the activities of the self, they are all parts of the inevitable process of experiencing. Qua *thing* the existence of the self is in its relation to 'other' things; qua *self*, its relation is one of active experience. And the essential being of the self may be thought of most accurately as the concrete body

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doing. While, at some moments in his life Coleridge is a sad example of a real infirmity of will amounting almost to a negation of self.

of its experiences. To discuss this further is impossible here. But it must at least be clear that the conclusion is largely warranted by our discussion of the nature of thinghood. For if a thing is its activities, the self must be *its* activities, and the exact nature of those I have made some small attempt to elucidate.

We have not yet reached a final answer to our problem, for there is still another question we must ask ourselves. What is the nature of this body of experiences? An implicit answer has, however, been given; for we have seen that the concrete body of experiences which is the finite self must, in some sense, be a unity. Experience we distinguished from mere sensation by saying that it possessed this quality of being or tending to be a unit; experience means a co-ordinated body of experiences, which is not other than a collection of experiences possessing some degree of unity.[20] The process of experiencing is well described by Goethe when he says that our life is made up of our connections with the world about us, and that we must each spin our own web and sit at the centre to catch what we can.[21] The web itself is made up of past experiences, and each new connection with the world about us, in so far as it is fully known and understood, is an addition to that web, and so an added means

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[20] All that is to be said about the self's continuity is implied in what I have called its unity.

[21] J.W. Goethe to F. Schiller, *Correspondence between Schiller and Goethe, from 1794 to 1805*, Letter no. 579, tr. L. D. Schmitz, 2 vols, (London: George Bell and Sons, 1879), ii. 197. ['No one can find himself in himself or in others; in fact, he has himself to spin his web from the centre of which he exercises his influence.'] I am conscious throughout this discussion of the at least verbal denial of the true nature of the self by speaking of it as a thing in the sense of an isolated 'body'. But it should be clear that this is merely verbal, almost necessitated, certainly intimated, by our ordinary manner of speech which for practical purposes divides our world into self and 'others' in a way quite unjustified by a true view of the facts of life. To reject this convention of speech would, I think, cause more confusion than to retain it; but so long as we do not argue that facts must follow our ordinary way of describing them, it matters little which course we take.

of experiencing. But can we say that a finite self, as we know it, is in the fullest sense a unit? We have seen already that finally there is only one form of unity—a whole which, by the comprehensiveness of its content, excludes the possibility of disunity. Such a unity as this we can attribute only to the universe. But every finite and limited achievement of a unity, however incomplete, necessarily implies and stretches out towards this absolute condition. In the case of the State we found ourselves led to the conclusion that to States, as they exist in the finite world, can be attributed only a degree of that quality which is their essence—Statehood. And to this point also has our consideration of the self led us. The only true, because the only perfect, self is the universe; for the universe alone achieves that unity of experience which is the essence of selfhood.[22] Finite, actual selves can be said only to approximate to this ideal state of selfhood, and yet, at the same time, to presuppose it. And those among them are truest selves which possess the greatest fund of unified experience, that is, the largest and most varied, and at the same time most co-ordinated, body of connections with the world. Since it is often in error, always liable to error through imperfection of unity, and in a state of continual experiencing, the finite self is never a complete self. But having within itself the elementary purpose and matter of selfhood, this being its real nature, it must be defined as a unity of characteristic experiences.

It is now possible to restate our notion of the relationship of a self to its world. The self, we saw, 'requires' its society, but it has become clear that this is a miserable understatement of the real facts. A self not only requires its society, but in the fullest sense *is* its society. It is a common experience that a self enlarges as it acquires new points of contact with the world, finds new interests, or contracts new

[22] Again, Spinoza, *Ethics*, Bk 2 df. 6: 'Reality and perfection I use as synonymous terms' [See n. 77, above]. And compare Ethics, Bk 1, note to second proof of Proposition XI. [Spinoza provides three proofs of this proposition, but only the third has a note added to it, which includes the following passage: 'a being absolutely infinite, such as God, has from himself an absolutely infinite power of existence, and hence he does absolutely exist': see *Works*, ii. 53.]

friendships. And in like manner, bereavement, isolation from the practice of cherished interests, exile, and estrangement from friends, are known as no less than an actual mutilation of self. For in the one case, we have literally added to the content of self; and in the other, we have literally lost a part of ourselves.[23] The great man, he who possesses a degree of self-hood above the common lot, is original because he is receptive, strong because he is susceptible, and great because he comprehends within himself so large an experience. So far from being that which is most hidden from the influence of the world, the self is that which is most nearly connected with it.

> 'I have sometimes sat looking at a comrade', records an American philosopher, 'speculating on this mysterious isolation of self from self. Why are we so made that I gaze and see of thee only thy Wall, and never Thee? This Wall of thee is but a movable part of the Wall of my world; and I also am a Wall to thee: we look at one another from behind masks. How would it seem if my mind could but once be *within* thine; and we could meet and without barrier be with each other? And then it has fallen upon me like a shock—as when one thinking himself alone has felt a presence—But I *am* in thy soul. These things around me are in thy experience. They are thy own; when I touch them and move them I change *thee*. When I look on them I see what thou seest … I experience thy very experience. For *where art thou*? Not there, behind those eyes, within that head, in darkness, fraternizing with chemical processes. Of these, in my own case, I know nothing, and will know nothing; for my existence is spent not behind my Wall, but in front of it … And there art thou also. This world in which I live, is the world of thy soul; and being within that, I am within thee. I can imagine no contact more real and thrilling than this; that we should meet and share identity, not through ineffable inner depths (alone), but here through the foregrounds of common experience, and that thou shouldst be—not behind

[23] There can be few whose experience has not acquainted them with the sad truth that '*Partir, c'est mourir un peu.*' [See E. Haraucourt, '*Rondel de l'adieu*', in *Seul* (Paris: Bibliothèque-Charpentier, 1891), p. 12. The poem begins '*Partir, c'est mourir un peu, / C'est mourir à ce qu'on aime: / On laisse un peu de soi-même / En toute heure et dans tout lieu.*']

> that mask—but *here*, pressing with all thy consciousness upon me, *containing* me, and these things of mine.'[24]

To what conclusion, then, are we led? Briefly, we have found it unavoidable that 'The Ego that pretends to be anything either before or beyond its concrete psychical filling is a gross fiction and mere monster, and for no purpose admissible.'[25] From this we have arrived at the conception of self as a unity of characteristic experience; those experiences, its 'concrete filling', are none other than its society; and its society is its State. The self is the State; the State is the self.[26]

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[24] W.E. Hocking, *The Meaning of God in Human Experience A Philosophic Study of Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press; London: Henry Frowde for Oxford University Press, 1912), pp. 265–6.

[25] Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, p. 89.

[26] It is unnecessary to explain the relation of a self to *the* self, for it runs on parallel lines with the explanation I gave in the case of the State. I have also thought it unnecessary to go into full details concerning the notion of degrees of self-hood or the idea of unity after what was said on these matters in Ch. 4.

The State and the Self

There are a few loose threads in our discussion of the State and the self which may conveniently be gathered up at this point, though I must still postpone treatment of the most important conclusion which arises from it—the nature and meaning of sociability.

Let us first sum up our conclusions.

(i) The State is the social whole. If it can be shown that this whole is non-existent and a mere fiction, then we have demonstrated that the State does not exist. So far this has not been attempted; all that critics of this view of things have achieved is to show that the actual 'States' of what (in legal terms) is called the European State system do not present themselves as obviously possessing this quality of wholeness. This, of course, was only to be expected. To have it demonstrated with such acumen, and in such detail, is valuable, but we must never lose sight of the fact that demonstrations of this sort neither enter the realm of political philosophy, nor are of such a nature as to form any intelligible criticism of that study.

Following from this, the State must be regarded not merely as a collection of persons, though it may be true that without a collection of persons no State could exist, but as a conception of life. All associations owe their being to a solidarity of opinion and belief, and with the State this is so *par excellence*. The reason for this is that the State is (a) the name we give to that society in the actual world that achieves the highest degree of those qualities which go to make an ideal association, and (b) the ideal association itself.

(ii) The Self, so far from being an isolated centre removed from all influence of the world around, is none other than an actual unity of experiences. These experiences are the self's world, theoretically quite indistinguishable from the self's self. In short, the self is the State, and the State is the self. The idea of the individual as an isolated entity existing in its own right, living its life independently of 'other' things and admitting only a limited interference of the things which go to make up its world, is a mass of contradictions. Individuality, that is, the quality which endows an individual with

his nature as such, is a matter neither of apartness nor of difference, and these words give us no assistance in explaining the thing before us. Individuality means finding our activity within a whole. *Immer strebe zum Ganzen*, says Schiller; and that whole is at once the Self and the State.[1]

The empirical self is sometimes regarded as a unity. But this is not so. No 'thing' is a unit. What we see of it, its 'body', is as the runner's momentary victory as compared with the years of patient practice which gave him the skill and strength to accomplish the act. 'For there is not so complete and perfect a part that we know of nature, which does not owe the being it has, and the excellence of it, to its neighbours.'[2] It is said, too, that the individual self is the only originator of ideas or actions, and that it is through the individual that the State, or any community, receives its life. But if by 'individual self' is meant the 'body' which seems to be separate from its world, then it is certain that the isolated 'self' has no power of origination or even of life. And if, on the other hand, the 'self' here is the true, the whole self, then the statement is meaningless, for this entity is indistinguishable from its community.

There is a feeling, shared by many, that to speak thus of the self is to degrade and even to enslave it. But this, also, misconstrues the tenor of our remarks. For, in the first place, theoretical truth is not necessarily the best guide to practice. And so the legal conception of self as body has a valuable part to play in common life; though such notions arising out of, and ministering to, utility in the narrowest sense, can make no claim to express the truth.[3] And in the second place, all that we have said has gone to show that we can neither

[1] [J.W. von Goethe, 'The Four Seasons', in *Selected Verse*, tr. D. Luke (London: Penguin, 1984 [1964]), p. 129: '*Immer strebe zum Ganzen, und kannst du selber kein Ganzes / Werden, als dienendes Glied schliess an ein Ganzes dich an*'; 'Always aim at what is whole; and if you cannot become a whole yourself, then attach yourself to a whole as a member in its service.']

[2] Locke, *Essay*, Bk 4 ch. vi §11.

[3] Shakespeare, 'The Phoenix and the Turtle', ll. 37–40: 'Property was thus appall'd / That the self was not the same / Single nature's double name / Neither two nor one was call'd.'

elevate the 'State' (in any sense) above the individual self, nor the self above the State, for the two things are not only indistinguishable, but actually the same thing. Taking the words in their real meaning, 'Man *versus* the State' is sheer nonsense; but we can see in it an attempt to describe a state of affairs when the individual self feels itself cramped and restricted by some larger, apparently social, body which has power to coerce him; but to call this body the State, or this 'man' an individual, is surely absurd. 'Society without the individual is not more of an abstraction than the individual without society'. The blind, fettered individual, 'untroubled by a spark', is both the product and evidence of a blind, unconscious, and restricted society. The reflecting, sensitive individual, tied to a comprehensive world with many and intimate interests, both is, and is the child of, a unified and comprehensive society. Such an individual is a citizen; such a society, a State. It cannot be said that any single individual enters completely into the whole social experience of his society, but that part of which we avail ourselves by understanding it, is our experience of the whole; some have a comparatively complete experience, others an experience limited and restricted on every side by ignorance, insensitiveness, pride, and selfishness—which is the same thing as saying that some possess the qualities of individuality in a higher degree than others. It has been said that 'man completes himself in the State, but without losing his own individuality',[4] and this expresses a very prevalent view. But the truth is that so far from there being any likelihood of his losing his individuality in this manner, the State is his only chance of achieving it. The State, as Hegel says, is the individual's substance.

There is a question, causing no little trouble to writers about the State, which, so far, I have left untouched. The chief reason for this apparent neglect is that its claim to be treated as a part of the strict subject-matter of political philosophy is as slender as the claim of the problem of nationality.[5] But, like the latter, custom bids us at least recognize its existence. The problem runs as follows. Every

[4] Lioy, *The Philosophy of Right*, ii. 76.

[5] See Ch. 4, Note C, p. 86, above.

man is a member of a 'State'—in the legal sense of the word. But there is a wider society to which he is regarded as owing some sort of loyalty. And his allegiance to his 'State' is often thought of as limited by his loyalty to this wider society. The question is, What is the relationship of these two loyalties? Or, as it is sometimes put, What is the relation of the 'State' to 'Society'?

That such a problem can arise only when we use the word 'State' in its strictly legal significance is clear enough. For in its true meaning a man's loyalty to his State has none of the exclusiveness here suggested. He is a member of, and at the same time is, a whole—his State; which in turn, because it is an actual State and not fully realized, tends towards and presupposes a more perfect condition of existence. There is no larger moral society than his State, for what is wider and other than that is not in any sense a moral society. This does not rest on mere assertion. The State is that association in the actual world which most nearly achieves moral comprehensiveness. That is what the word means; and it was what Hegel meant when he said that the State is 'the ethical universe'. It is sheer nonsense to say that 'In ethical truth, there is only one ultimate community, which is the human race.'[6] A man's State is no more exclusive than a unified body of experience, i.e. a self. A certain body of experiences may exclude us from adopting certain opinions, but in so far as it is unified, that is, comprehensive, the only opinions it can exclude from us are those at variance with the truth. So it is with the real State, which, like the self, is liable to error only when it deserts its 'statehood'.

Nevertheless, it is perhaps instructive to examine the position in which we find ourselves from this purely legal point of view. The fact appears that we are members of certain restricted societies, but feel ourselves to owe some allegiance to individuals outside these limited groups. What is the meaning of this double loyalty, in itself often involving contradictions? How a man comes to belong to one society rather than another is difficult to determine, and (like all

[6] L.T. Hobhouse, *Principles of Sociology*, 5 vols (London: Routledge/Thoemmes, 1996 [1922]), vol. 3, *The Elements of Social Justice*, p. 199.

questions of origin) fortunately entirely irrelevant to our discussion. He *is* a member of a particular society from his earliest hours, and so great is the influence of that society over him that it is true to say that 'a child might possibly change his country; a man can only wish that he might change it.'[7] The fact is that, though we were not consulted in the matter, our debt to 'the laws' is of such a nature as to bind us to them for life with something more than gratitude. Whether or not a man is accustomed to think or talk in terms larger than those of his own limited society, it is permanently true that only through his particular station and the faithful performance of its particular duties, can he take hold of this thing called 'humanity'. 'What does and always must guide men is their personal relation to the little circle which they actually influence.'[8]

An analogy may serve to illustrate the relation of a man to 'humanity' through his society. And in this case it is more than an analogy, it is an exact description of the relationship itself. Moral sentiment—at least in our part of the world—has come to admit that love may not be spent on the opposite sex as a sex. And this is so simply because love, in its true nature, does not appear under such conditions. Love is spent morally—that is, in human experience, with the highest and greatest satisfaction—upon a single personality. For each, the other *is* the sex in this regard. This is the exact relation between a man's allegiance to his society and to 'humanity'. The riches of the wider whole can reach us only through the (apparently) more limited loyalty; our friendship to men. The true cosmopolitan (of which but few exist) may escape the prejudice of a mis-spent and misunderstood attachment, but he precludes himself from enjoying any of the finer nuances of social life. And in so far as an actual State achieves a high degree of statehood, it will satisfy these demands; it is only when dealing with the imperfect, and therefore imperfectly

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[7] G. Santayana, *The Life of Reason or the Phases of Human Progress* (London: Archibald Constable & Co. Ltd, 1905), vol. 2, *Reason in Society*, pp. 173–4.

[8] L. Stephen, *The English Utilitarians*, 3 vols (London: Duckworth and Co., 1900), ii. 329–30.

true and real, that the problem of this dual loyalty arises. Among the many other points requiring discussion there is one, to which I have already adverted, which merits particular attention. I have already said a word about what is called the 'real will', but the investigation of the identification of this with the 'general will' I postponed until the nature of the self had been more fully enquired into.

It has not, I think, been made sufficiently clear, in modern works on the subject that the whole of this problem and its solution lies in the view we take of the nature of the self. Writers have treated the subject from a legal, a sociological, and a psychological standpoint, without any clear realization that they are dealing with a metaphysical conception of the nature of the self and the will. Attempts to demonstrate the unity of men in society by mere insistence upon the existence of a kind of 'fellow feeling' and an economic interdependence between men, are doomed to failure. For such a unity can be made to rest only upon some wider and more fundamental conception of 'the values in which, and in the will for which, mankind are one';[9] that is upon a coherent notion of the self and its relationship to the universe. The truth of the matter is to be found in Spinoza's dictum that 'all reasonable men agree';[10] and if we are now looking at the matter from the aspect of volition and not cognition, it is only to discover the same solution and in similar terms.

We have seen that self-hood, and its activities of thought and will, is something which cannot be attributed (any more than thing-hood) to isolated bodies. It is something which joins [us] to the universe, not separates us from it; for the universe is the only perfect self, and we are selves in so far as we approach its comprehensive existence. In matters of cognition, truth is for us the right experience and affirmation of the universe in our own minds, it is simply a

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[9] Bosanquet, 'Preface' to *Philosophical Theory of the State*, 3rd edn (London: Macmillan & Co., 1920), p. xvi.

[10] Spinoza, *Ethics*, Bk 4, prop. xxxv [*Works*, ii. 209: 'In so far only as men live in obedience to reason, do they always necessarily agree in nature.']

joining of ourselves to the whole which admits no contradiction. So also, volition, in so far as it is real (that is, consciously directed towards real and not merely actual purposes) is a single entity in the universe, of which we partake in varying degrees.

That actual life presents a superficial observer with 'a series of special wills none of which can claim any necessary pre-eminence',[11] no one would deny. But in so far as they are at variance they are not properly called 'wills', for they are the misdirected impulses of isolated deficiency and inexperience; that is, they demonstrate a lack of self-hood through isolation and ignorance. 'When the particular will is actually different from the universal, it is led by caprice, random insight and desire, and is opposed to general right.'[12] An example may, perhaps, be excused, for though it proves nothing, it may put the matter in a clearer light. When a fire breaks out in a theatre it is at least part of the real will of everyone present that no-one should perish. Like Ulysses, each wishes to pass through the hour of danger in safety.[13] But the expressions of this real and common will are, no doubt, various. Some rush for the places of exit, others shout, a few remain calm. But while the characteristic of each is that he thinks he is rightly expressing his real will, the whole fact is that some of those expressions, through inexperience in the widest sense, are more erroneous than others, that is, less comprehensive and so less real than others.

As we look at things from the point of view of the 'individual', we find that his real will is his will qua individual. And in like manner, the general will is the will of his society as such. But, since the self and its society cannot in this way be separated, the general

[11] Laski, *Foundations of Sovereignty*, p. vi.

[12] Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §81, p. 85.

[13] Homer, *Odyssey*, xii. 62 [Probably an allusion to the section of the poem in which Circe tells Odysseus how to successfully navigate the dangers posed by the Sirens, and by Skylla and Charybdis]. Of course, to some 'safety' will mean merely bodily preservation, while to others it will mean a freedom (even if it entails death) from any surrender to the indignity and vulgarity of panic. But these differences do not affect the point in question.

can be none other than the real will. As such it has qualities of infallibility and finality, for we have seen that its content is always universal. But the point of paramount importance is that in this matter of will, 'generality' is a qualitative term and has *no* reference to number. This has been insisted upon by every writer who has in any way understood the conception. The mention of the 'will of all' (in actual society) with the 'general will', can be made only to register their dissimilarity. As such they have nothing whatever in common.

With this identification of the real will and the general will our discussion might end, except that it seems a little gratuitous to have introduced the term 'general will', only to show that it is but another name for something we have already enquired into. And, indeed, it is true that, could we keep securely in mind the real nature of the individual, the introduction of such a term would be entirely needless. But since this is difficult, thinkers have been forced to include an idea of society in their speculations, and with it naturally comes the notion of a general will. We may abandon both or keep both, as we please; but for truth's and safety's sake the latter course is advisable.

In conclusion I will notice one form of objection to the idea of a general will. It is sometimes asked, Is there necessarily a higher quality of volition when men are gathered together in a State than when they will in isolation? The answer is implicit in what has already been said, but I venture to reiterate the point. The phrase, 'men gathered together in a State' implies a definite relationship existing between them; and our discussion of that relationship has already led us to the conclusion that it presupposes a unity of will and purpose, not merely of action and result. 'Others' are a part of our self; and clearly we cannot arrive at a real will until it is the will of our whole self, and that is of our society. Obviously it is not a real will if it is only an agreement for purposes of action of a number of differently-minded persons. The will of a State, as such, is of a higher quality than the 'will' (so-called) of an isolated individual because, and only because, the will of a whole self is of a higher

quality than the volitional impulses of an entity—the isolated 'self'—whose being harbours such inconsistency and is filled with such ignorance and incomprehensiveness, that we are driven to class it as a cipher, a nothing, a mere fiction.

Government and Law

The real nature of a man is often obscured by the very nearness of the view we are permitted. The reason why a prophet seldom wins honour in his own country is because there he is rarely known as he really is. The familiar, homely view often obscures his full nature in the same way as its grandeur and immensity of outline is obscured when we stand too close to some monument of architecture. And, on the contrary, men sometimes appear greater than they really are when we see them against the background of a restricted life. Institutions are in like case. It is often in so far as they enter intimately into our daily life, that we are given opportunity of reading them amiss.[1] To a man burning with moral zeal for the reformation of his kind, government will often seem a useless obstruction, hindering the immediate execution of his daring plans. The eager lepidopterist, conscious of nothing but his passion to secure a specimen of a certain butterfly, may find himself thwarted by the laws of trespass, and in an unguarded moment government and law will appear in the light of an evil genius overshadowing his life, intent on hindering his ends. And even if no such emergent incident leads us to hasty judgments of this kind, we all experience no small difficulty in seeing such institutions as government and law as they really are.[2] But, since the question we have set ourselves on all these matters is, What are they? it is imperative that we succeed in seeing them not as they appear as they pass, entering our consciousness in this or that fragmentary form, but as they really are. Short of this, short of a theory, a view of the whole, there is no such thing as a true definition.

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[1] [Oakeshott's marginal note: '"*Il faut beaucoup de philosophie pour observer les faits qui sont trop près de nous*." Rousseau.' The quotation has not been traced.]

[2] [Oakeshott's marginal note: '"Perpetual custom", says Cicero, "makes the mind callous, and people neither admire nor require a reason for those things which they constantly behold."' The quotation has not been traced.]

To see this thing, government, definitely is to see it as part of a whole, and to understand exactly how the aims and means of that part fit in with the aims and means of the whole. Now, the social whole, into which must fit all that comprises human life as such, and to which every part must be referred for its meaning, we have called the State. What place does government hold within the system of this life? or, in other words, what is the relation of government to the State?[3]

Before I embark upon the answer to this question there is one point in the speculations of contemporary writers on this subject which demands attention. There is a certain school of writers who simplify their politics by an initial identification of the government with the State. Few of them produce any valid arguments (or any arguments at all) in justification of this *saltus*, and so, even if such a procedure were not amply answered by the arguments I have put forward concerning the nature of the State, little save counter-assertion could properly be demanded. But there is a single argument, appearing in various forms, which we may profitably examine. To buttress the assertion that the government is the State, Mr Laski and others point out that, whatever the State is, it must act through its organs, and that its 'primary organ' is the government.[4] If, behind the word State Mr Laski and his friends

[3] Cf. 'He [Montesquieu] regards legislation and its specific traits not in an isolated and abstract way, but rather as a dependent element of one totality, connecting it with all the other elements which form the character of a nation and an epoch. In this interrelation the various elements receive their meaning and justification.' Hegel, 'Introduction' to *Philosophy of Right*, §3, p. 5.

[4] Laski, *Foundations of Sovereignty*, p. 236 ['The state … must act through organs; and … it is upon government that we must concentrate our main attention']; *Authority in the Modern State*, p. 26 ['The fundamental fact is that when we speak of acts done by America the actor is a government']. See also his note in the English translation of L. Duguit, *Law in the Modern State*, tr. F. Laski and H. Laski (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1921), p. 61. ['The reader ought to note that M. Duguit throughout uses state as identical with government, on the

have no notion of a social whole, and in saying that the State is the government, or the government is the State, they are merely making an assertion in the terms '*a* is *a*', that is, one devoid of significance, it would be foolish to argue. But, on the other hand, if they intend to affirm that the government is the social whole, then a matter for debate is raised. But it is a one-sided affair, for it would occupy an ingenious schoolboy debater to produce even plausible arguments in favour of so fantastic a proposition. Examine any association of men we choose, and the fact that its government, rules, or laws do not comprise the whole, and are not even the primary expression of its life, is clear as noonday. A school has rules and regulations, but when these are computed we have not come to its real life at all, and to set them up as the *whole*, or as the primary expression of the whole, seems to me a trifle Boetian. Associations for the most meager immediate ends, such as commerce or sport, cannot be identified with their government, and *a fortiori* such an identification is nonsense in the case of an association for the political or perfectly realized life. The government is neither the social whole, nor the 'primary organ' of that whole—for 'practical' or any other purposes. It is not and can never be in any position other than one of subservience, for no flight of imagination can picture it as an end in itself. The notion is based upon a view of the universe too meaningless for us to entertain.[5]

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ground that its power is, for practical purposes, exerted by the latter. On the justification of this cf. Laski, *Authority in the Modern State*, Ch. 1.']

This statement is true only if we are prepared to regard the power commonly exerted by government as equal to the power and influence of the social whole as expressed and exerted by poets and painters, teachers, preachers, and heroes, when it becomes not only an *argumentum in circulo*, but sheer nonsense. It may also be noted that these writers will neither identify the State with the government, nor will they admit that there is any difference between them, but obscure the whole issue by such phrases as, 'for practical purposes'.

[5] Cf. F.H. Bradley, *Essays on Truth and Reality* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1914), p. 6. ['Practice is the perpetual undoing of the condition

Although remarks on the origin of this or any other idea of the State form no part of my plan, this is a notion which has influenced so largely English political thinking that it is impossible to pass it by without notice. It has arisen, I think, partly from the Anglo-Saxon feeling that government is everyone's work and no man's special province, and partly from the belief, grown to gigantic proportions at the end of the nineteenth century, that Acts of Parliament are the sole effectual means of improving the life of the community.[6] Englishmen have ever found it impossible to believe that government is as much a business to be learned as shoe-making or joinery, and in consequence have looked upon it as an occupation for all men, as the pre-eminent business of society as a whole. But if we stand to watch a shoemaker at his last, we see nothing intelligible unless we link up this single activity with the social whole of which it is a part, for the reasonableness of this occupation is to be found only in the larger whole of custom and manner of life which has called it into being. So it is with the legislator and him who occupies himself with the things of government. His business is a single activity of society, the rationality of which can be perceived only when we join it on to the social whole. And its own insufficiency is demonstrated by the fact that if we view it as the whole itself we make of it (in the

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which is implied in its own existence, and it cannot therefore offer by itself a satisfaction which is ultimate.']

[6] This may be illustrated by a couple of quotations:

'In my own opinion, a disproportionate amount of English energy takes political forms, and there is a dangerous exaggeration in the prevailing tendency to combat all social and moral abuses by Acts of Parliament.' W.E.H. Lecky, *The Map of Life Conduct and Character* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1899), pp. 60–1.

'An outstanding characteristic of the times, in which the future historian will find much food for thought, is the enormous exaggeration of the importance of politics. If politics meant in modern practice what they meant to Plato, Aristotle, or Dante, it would be impossible to exaggerate their importance. But, unfortunately, they have come to mean something else.' L.P. Jacks, *Realities and Shams* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1923), p. 55.

literal sense) a preposterous monster. Societies viewed solely in the light of their governmental activities are not wholes; a government unconnected with some larger activity to which it is subservient is fortunately an unthinkable chimera. 'If citizens be friends they have no need of justice, but, though they be just, they need friendship also; indeed, the most complete realization of justice seems to be the realization of friendship also.'[7] The State is friendship; the government is that justice which has meaning only when we see it as potentially consummated in friendship.

But to return from controversy to the positive matter in hand. If we are to have a true notion of the real nature of government, we must set about to view it as a single activity within the system of activities we have called the State. Just as we link up, in our more lucid moments, our own life with the life of our society, and so give it its true meaning and significance, so we must join this activity to the unified experience of the whole. And to do this we must come at some clear notion of the nature of State Action.

State action is, necessarily, the action of the social whole. And since, as we have seen, the State is the individual and the individual is the State, all 'individual' action directed towards the ends of the State, that is the ends of the political or complete life, is State action. A father bringing his son up to appreciate poetry is thereby performing an action of the State, while a nation waging an unnecessary war is working against the ends of the State. State action implies a certain quality of action; it is action directed towards certain ends, and not merely the impulse or policy of a certain body of officials or class of society. All societies, as such, possess some of this quality of statehood, and in the same way, all actions whatsoever possess a modicum of that same quality. This we cannot avoid. There is no such thing as an 'individual' action which is not at the same time an action of the State; there is no action so intimate or so personal that it can be called a self-regarding activity in contradistinction to a State-regarding activity. That which touches the self touches the State, for the self, qua self,

[7] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Bk8 ch.i§4 [tr. F.H. Peters].

is the State. Education in England is usually divided into what is called 'State Education' and 'Private Education' (or, such is the confusion of words, 'Public Education'). This naturally assumes a merely legal definition of the State, but from importing this idea into our political philosophy untold confusion has resulted. On our definition of the State, it is clear that all education whatever, carried on within the social whole, is State education. And that which is financed from so-called 'public' funds is not more an activity of the State than that which is carried on as a 'private' enterprise. That education which leads to the most perfect development of human character is most truly State education. And it is only our distorted view of things which makes it appear an anomaly that the truest State education, at any given time, may be that which has least the form of a public institution, and that which achieves a lesser degree of this quality of statehood, may be that which has the widest public support.[8] These conclusions, as illustrated in the instance of education, are in no way an advance on what I have said before about the nature of the State, they follow inevitably from the view of things I briefly sketched above.

But this does not end the matter. Though all action, as such, is State action in one degree or another, examination reveals, what might easily have been suspected, that the State has many activities which proceed on a variety of plans and use a variety of means. Within the community of interests and endeavours which go to make up the life of a school, we can distinguish with some degree of definiteness two complementary varieties of activity. On the one hand, there is the sphere of action which comes within the special province of command; and, on the other, that which is, as we say, voluntary, or subject only to permissive legislation. The borderline between these two is somewhat vague, but being within the real whole of activity-experience, it is of no great moment how the

[8] History and personal experience afford many examples of this notion. Of all Athenians Socrates and Phidias were men who served their country best, yet one died at the hand of the government and the other in exile.

borderline cases are decided so long as the governing principles of each kind of activity are observed. For instance, no schoolmaster would frame a rule commanding every boy to 'be healthy'. Instead, he uses what seems to be an indirect method and, so far as command goes, says 'play games'. If we can understand the grounds and reasonableness of this difference we are well on our way towards achieving a definite view of the nature of government and its place within the social whole. There is a special province of command, this is the realm of government. Roughly, it is the region of force, and our task is to see what is the nature of the limitations of this kind of activity, that is, what are the things and aspects of things which come properly within its purview. To do this we will ask ourselves two questions—(i) What is the end of Government? (ii) What are the means of Government?

(i) In our definition of the nature of the will, we discovered that, though in many cases volitional activity is ignorant of its own ends and may even seem to contradict them by its methods, the end of all volition is universal. When I wish for a meal, my real desire is for a new state of self—in this case, a state of self in which hunger is appeased. And when I wish for another state of self, my wish is always for a perfect state of self. The good is that which all men desire. This notion does not neglect the facts of ignorance and near-sightedness which constantly thwart us in our energy of will, it is a description of the whole activity within which our blunders alone have meaning. This principle, to which I have adhered throughout, may now be applied to our view of the end of that kind of social activity we call government.

As we shall shortly see, government is naturally (i.e. by *its* nature) limited in many respects. Its influence cannot be universal; its scope is not co-extensive with that of the whole activity of the State. Nevertheless, in the fullest possible sense, its will is universal. Though a school rule cannot in itself command the health of each boy who comes under it, yet its desire, however indirectly it must be expressed, is always for that state of life which it can foster but not command. And its end is achieved only when the final end of

the whole is achieved, for its action has meaning only when seen as contributory to the larger activity. 'The majesty and dignity and power of the law are to be seen wholly and solely where we never look for it, viz. in the truthful, honest, mutually helpful and upright lives of those with whom, as we put it, "the law takes nothing to do".'[9] We shall misconceive the nature of government, if in fixing our attention upon the limitations of its means, we forget the universality of its end. Its action is part and parcel of the action of the social whole, of the State, and its partiality is evinced in the particularity of its powers and not in any restriction of its end. Force, law, government cannot achieve all things, but they will do so as fully as the whole, which, as such, can and does achieve its end. Every day we have the experience of the apparent refusal of actual government and law to concern themselves with certain aspects of the life of the community, but we shall completely misunderstand the reasonableness of this if we regard it as mere apathy or lack of interest. It is just because government is interested in these things, just because in its universal will it desires their accomplishment, that it leaves untouched that which its touch would mar. The occasions when government stays its hand are as eloquent of its real purpose as those when it enters our life as a regulative force.

These remarks must not be taken to imply that actual government makes no mistakes, never enters where it should remain without, and vice versa. I am speaking here of the real nature of government, government as such, just as on a previous page I spoke of the will, not with a view either to displaying or discounting the ignorance which often guides it, but of the will as such, seen in that wholeness which alone gives it being or meaning.

(ii) The idea of limitations as unnatural restrictions, confining an activity which would otherwise be, and would naturally be, universal, is the basis of the utilitarian philosophy: a philosophy which thinks in terms of physical areas and material limits. However, the nature of all true limitations (and here we are particularly interested in the limitations of government) is that they are necessary, that is, self-

[9] Duff, *Spinoza's Political and Ethical Philosophy*, p. 299.

limitations. In its essential nature, the sphere of government is not universal, and it is no hardship, no thwarting of [an] eternal plan, for it to recognize this limitation and to act under its guidance. Perhaps the true doctrine of the nature of governmental limitation is summed up in the saying 'Might is Right'. It is lamentable that this dictum has frequently been misconceived and put to base ends, but when fully understood it forms an essential part of any true political philosophy, and, indeed, of any true cosmology. In its vulgar form it appears most uncompromisingly in the writings of Nicholas Machiavelli, though his conception is probity itself as compared with the notions of many a modern anti-Machiavel. But, in modern philosophy, the first glimpse of the true view of the conception of 'might is right' as applying to government is to be found in the political writings of Spinoza. Briefly it is this. Government, as such, has a limited sphere of activity. This limitation is self-limitation; and the proper province of government comprehends all that it is able to accomplish. Government may not attempt that which it is unable to achieve; that which it is able to achieve is its true and proper sphere of action. Ask and answer the question, What *can* government do? and we have solved the problem of what it ought to do, that is, we have defined its limits and discovered its particular nature. Its might is its right.

Much of the confusion which has arisen on this point is due to a misconception of the nature of 'might'. When we say of a man that he has a right to believe what he is able to believe we are not thereby justifying him for believing anything or nothing; we are expressing our confidence in his wisdom and experience. We can no more believe anything we like than we can think or do anything we like. Our beliefs, our thoughts, our desires are governed by our experience. What we are able to do depends upon what we are able to desire, and not upon any hypothetical physical ability. Most men are physically capable of beating their wives, but in the truest possible sense a large proportion are quite incapable of such an action, because it conflicts fundamentally with their mental and moral attitude to life. So with government. By sheer physical

coercion it could regulate many social activities hitherto left in the hands of other kinds of State action, but in so doing would defeat its own ends. It is logically impossible to think of government, qua government, performing actions which contradict its own nature, and so it is literally incapable of attempting to regulate that which it were better to leave undisturbed. Produce what instances we will of the evil effects of governmental regulation and the truth of our proposition remains unaffected. We cannot deny that 'government' constantly makes mistakes—that is, contradicts its own essential nature—but that it does so, qua government, is an inconceivable occurrence. In so far as a government (or anything else) commits blunders, denies its own essential nature, it becomes so much less than government.

Here are two instances of what I mean. Both concern matters of small importance, but, for all that, are not less illustrative of the principle involved. In Paris, legislation (it is obviously of no consequence whether it is legislation on the part of a minor association or on the part of the 'government') has introduced a system of numbered tickets to ensure the fair and ordered treatment of would-be omnibus passengers. The argument behind the system must be something as follows: 'We know that all men do not possess the graces of polite behaviour, and that even those who observe the fair rules of courtesy are apt to forget them in the rush of modern life. Law, though it wills to, cannot inculcate the graces of decorous behaviour into those over whom it holds its sway. *That* is beyond its might, and so beyond its right. Nevertheless, it is able to make such

regulations as can order the outward behaviour of its citizens, even if it does not touch their inward consciousness. Let us contribute what we can, and in so doing we achieve what we ought.'[10] On the other hand, a law has recently been introduced by one of the American States 'to prevent women from searching their husbands' pockets'. To the utilitarian this would seem wrong, not because government is *unable* to effect what it sets out to do, but because it is interfering with what is held to be a man's 'private' life. But no explanation in terms of 'undue interference' really meets the facts. The reason why such a law goes against the principles of government is because it would be impossible to make it properly effective. It is beyond the right of government to legislate in this manner, because it is beyond its might.

But a third example, dealing with a more important aspect of social life, will illustrate this principle more generally. What I have been saying is sometimes put in the form of a contrast between law and morality. I have avoided that contrast in set terms, up to the present, because with it is so often associated the erroneous view that the will of the law is not as universal as the will of morality. Yet the contrast, when properly understood, is real enough. The sphere of moral action is the sphere of action of the social whole as a whole, and it is within this, but differing from it in the self-limitation of its means, that government and law hold away. What, for instance, is the proper relation of law to sexual morality? The

[10] The difference between true politeness which is nothing less than an exquisite moral sensibility, and such politeness as may be enforced, is well illustrated in this passage from E. Renan, *Souvenirs d'enfance et de jeunesse* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1897), pp. 355–8: '*La civilité extrême de mes vieux maîtres m'avait laissé un si vif souvenir, que je n'ai jamais pu m'en détacher …[mais observer], dans un monde qui n'est plus fait pour la civilité, les bonnes règles de l'honnêteté d'autrefois, ce serait jouer le rôle d'un veritable niais, et personne ne vous en saurait gré … il est clair que celui qui tiendrait à cette prescription en omnibus, par exemple, serait victime de sa déférence; je crois même qu'il manquerait aux règlements. En chemin de fer, combien y en a-t-il qui sentent que se presser sur le quai pour gagner les autres de vitesse et s'assurer de la meilleure place est une supreme grossièreté?*'

subject is wide enough to afford many examples, from which I will choose one. The difficulty of preserving a high standard of sexual morality has always been greatly increased, both in rural and urban conditions, by inadequate housing. This is no new phenomenon arising from extreme overcrowding; on the contrary it is one with which all with any knowledge of the conditions of life of the rural and urban poor have long been acquainted.[11] Law has never attempted to enforce any standard of sexual morality as such, and to do so would be beyond its province. But in this instance, it is clear that legislation on the concrete problem of housing might be one of the most effectual contributions to that activity of the social whole which is continuously directed towards raising the moral standard of its citizens. A law commanding us to 'be moral' (that is, realize in our lives the moral standard roughly accepted by our society) would be one contradicting the very principles of legislation, and it is because government has this problem so nearly at heart that it refuses to interfere in this manner. Yet it is no passive spectator, but a hinderer of hindrances,[12] a creator of conditions. Its commands, with regard to sexual morality, take the form (among other forms) of, 'be sufficiently housed'. Its right is limited only by its might.[13]

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[11] Cf. Helen Bosanquet, *The Standard of Life and Other Studies* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1898), p. 34. ['There is no one with any knowledge of the poor who will not be able to recall instances of gross moral and physical evil arising out of overcrowded or insanitary dwellings.'] The municipal report on the housing conditions in Glasgow is the best 'modern instance' which has come my way. [Possibly *Glasgow Municipal Commission on the Housing of the Poor* (1904)]

[12] This phrase has been used by Bosanquet to describe the *State*, but this is obviously absurd.

[13] Of course, the practical difficulty with which governors are faced (at no time better illustrated that in the relation of the present government to the coal miners and owners) is so to sense the social and so to understand the actual might of government, as to introduce nothing it is unable, qua government, to achieve. See H.R. Mirabeau, *Travail sur l'éducation publique; trouvé dans les papiers de Mirabeau l'Aîné*, ed. P. Cabanis (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1791), p. 69: '*Le difficile, Messieurs, est de ne*

Again, government is properly conceived of as that part of State action which makes use of force. It can accomplish what force can accomplish, and this it must accomplish. No one imagines that a man can be forced to be brave or kind, and so the production of these virtues stands outside the means (but not outside the will) of government. Yet law can and does mitigate the effects of unkindness and cowardice, because it is possible to achieve this by means of coercion.

But here we are faced by another problem. It is clear enough that law makes use of force, but, in this, how far does it differ from the action of the State, the social whole, as such? Moral opinion can coerce a man to conform to the moral code of his society no less brutally than government can coerce him to obey its laws. After all, how true is it to say that while the characteristic of government is force, that of the State is something other than force? At first sight it would seem that, if (as we are bound to do) we class all kinds of coercive persuasion under the head of force, the action of the social whole as such, no less than the action of the government, is based upon and limited by its use of force. But such a first look does not place the facts in their true light. There is a real and fundamental difference between the force or coercion used by law to prevent me from obtaining money by false pretences, and the 'coercion' with which we can imagine, say, the philosophy of Hegel influencing our minds and persuading our notions. When we say that the sphere of governmental action is the sphere of force, we mean that it limits itself to an immediate aim of bringing about a certain type of *action* (though it *wills* a corresponding type of mind), while such persuasion of the mind as we are conscious of in the presence of ideas, affects our attitude of mind directly, and our actions only indirectly. State action as a whole is aimed towards the mind of its citizens. It is an appeal, such as Shakespeare or Michael Angelo may make, which speaks directly to the mind. In short, the activity of

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promulguer que des lois nécessaires, de rester à jamais fidèle a ce principe vraiment constitutionnel de la société, de se mettre en garde contre la fureur de gouverner, la plus funeste maladie des gouvernemens modernes.'

the State is none other than an interaction of spirits. When Plato said that rhetoric is 'the art of persuading the *minds* of men',[14] he expressed the same idea. Governmental action, as a part of State action, also desires to create a new state of mind, but it restricts itself, by its methods, to the production of a certain kind of outward behaviour, thereby creating the conditions under which the mind may receive and understand what the social whole would teach it. For the State, partly by its government, its laws, and its institutions, but still more by its spirit and culture, its , is a teacher, and it is the problem of education in all its subtleties which it sets itself to solve.

At the risk of a certain amount of recapitulation, I propose now to look at the nature of government from another point of view. The characteristic action of government is legislation in one form or another, for it is from this primary operation that its other activities of judication and administration derive. In nothing has modern speculation been more fortunate than in its contribution to the theory of law. This, indeed, may account in part for the legal bias so evident in such political theory of our own time as is not subject to the undisputed sway of psychology. But we should remember that there is all the difference in the world between a legal theory of law and a philosophical theory—as much difference between these as exists between a scientific theory of matter and a theory of matter which satisfies the demands and answers the questions of philosophy. Nevertheless modern legal theory has contributed much to our proper understanding of that part of State action we call government, and to look at this from the point of view of law and the nature of law, cannot but be illuminating. One of the most interesting contributions to this subject, marred alas! by a preposterous political philosophy, is M. Duguit's *Law in the Modern State*.

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[14] [This does not appear to be a direct quotation from Wright's translation of Plato, *Phaedrus*, 261a, where Socrates describes rhetoric as 'a method of winning men's souls by means of words', op. cit., p. 60. However, the view that rhetoric is 'the art of ruling the minds of men' is attributed to Plato by Plutarch: see Plutarch, 'Pericles', *Lives*, p. 119.]

What M. Duguit says, in effect, is that law and statute must no longer be considered as mere arbitrary commands (we may be tempted to ask who of any authority ever conceived them as such), but as subordinate to the State—society—to serve its needs. This is the function of government. But what he thinks, he says, is that the State (making it synonymous with the government) is now becoming a public servant, quitting its status as master and thereby losing its sovereignty. The whole issue is absurdly confused by the blind adherence to the legal meaning of every term as if it were the true meaning, but it seems to me by no means impossible that this new movement will succeed (while attempting to put a too exalted so-called 'State' in its place) in saying to government and the petty political interests and faiths of modern Europe, 'Give place', and relegating it to its proper position, will allow the true 'State' to take its rightful place as sovereign. Within the general movement there is, of course, much variety of opinion. It includes Durkheim and Duguit in France, Roscoe Pound in America, and Mr Laski in England, with their 'sociological' interpretation of law, and has its precursors in Germany and above all in Italy, the home of all vital legal theory from 1850 to 1890. And there are many refinements, perhaps the most interesting being that which (in intention, at least) harks back to Hegelian jurisprudence.[15]

To return from our digression. I suppose the popular view, the theory of the first look, is that law is a command issuing from some power outside ourselves which urges us, under certain penalties, to conform to certain standards of behaviour. The word 'command' has come to bear a meaning consonant only with force in its crudest sense, and often with arbitrary force. At all events, the source of command is envisaged as coming from outside ourselves, compelling us to conformity with something other than ourselves. Against this every theory of law which has ever attained wide acceptance has protested. The protest has taken various forms. The theory may have been that law is Reason made articulate, as with the Greeks, or that it conforms to some essential principle in the universe and

[15] See Krabbe, *The Modern Idea of the State*.

so in ourselves, or again, in our own day, that it is not so much a command, but a means of organization, the aim of which is not to compel men, but to serve public need. In spite of modern detractors, we must hold that law remains incomprehensible unless we see it as the means of activity of a government which in turn is but part of a social whole. And this social whole is itself incomprehensible unless we recognize it as somehow expressing what is fundamentally real. The idea that law, as such, is somehow part and parcel of final reason cannot be abandoned without leading us to a maze of meaningless contradictions.[16] Unless we see it as necessary we cannot see it as real, and unless we see it as real it cannot be recognized as reasonable. When, however, we are asked to abandon the idea of law as a command, we may pause to enquire what a command really is. If it is (according to the popular view) some arbitrary compulsion from the outside, forcing upon us a mode of behaviour which may be fundamentally at variance with our own notions or interests, then the sooner we abandon that idea of law the better it will be. But, in essence, a command is quite other than this, and has been recognized as such by every credible theory of law. A true command is a voice which tells us what we really desire. It is an educating influence, forcing upon us that which is the logical result of our real desires. And if we were wise enough we should find that it 'breathes such sense as our sense breeds with it'.[17] Thus, the end of law is the protection of the individual against his own waywardness, passion, ignorance and weakness. We need not hastily abandon our idea of law as a coercive command if we are prepared to take things as they really are in their wholeness. For the notion of command and force in no way prevents us from looking upon law (with the modern school of 'sociological' jurists) as 'social engineering'.[18] If it is a body

[16] In the same way as a metaphysic which distinguishes appearance and reality in the universe must point out the necessity of appearance, explain its reality.

[17] Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, Act II sc ii.

[18] My knowledge of Prof. Roscoe Pound's work is confined to a course of lectures he delivered in Cambridge in 1922, and since published. [R.

of knowledge which men have gradually collected about the ways and means of living together peaceably, whose justification is that it expresses their real needs, and whose immediate end is to lessen the friction and waste of social intercourse, it is no less a system of commands. As the laws of mathematics and his own practical experience are like so many commands to the engineer which he must obey or fail, and which he will obey because he knows their value, so laws, which are the public registration[19] of certain social facts, are commands to those who live the social life.

Government is the formulator and administrator of these commands, and as such is in the position of a 'public service'. It is 'a contrivance of human wisdom to provide for human *wants*.'[20] An attempt is being made to put this 'public service' on the same level as any other association which ministers to public needs, and in many respects this is a move in the right direction. Government is of the same fundamental nature as any other public service, in the same way as a social club has within it, in common with more comprehensive societies, that stuff of statehood which makes it what it is—an association of human beings. But, as in the latter case we do not hesitate to recognize that some associations have a greater degree of statehood than others, so in the former, we must not forget that government is a public service in scope and power far superior to other associations (e.g. associations for municipal supply) which, in their quality of being 'public', are of the same fundamental nature. It may be true that in many respects we have unduly elevated it, and that, for example, its liability for its torts should be recognized, but it argues a perverted sense of proportion

Pound, *Interpretations of Legal History* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1967 [1923]).]

[19] 'Law is the result of a common conviction not that a thing shall be, but that it is.' Gierke. [Oakeshott's translation of Gierke's maxim is identical to that given in E. Barker, 'The Discredited State', *Political Quarterly*, 2 (1915), 101–21, at 119 (reprinted in *Church, State, and Study*), where the quotation from Browning at p. 163, below, is also reproduced.]

[20] Burke, *Reflections*, i. 403.

to think that by binding a commercial handbook and a volume of Shakespeare in the same cover we make them of equal value.

There is another aspect of government which an enquiry into the nature of law brings out. It is what I have already called its partiality. Law, it is recognized, can never form a complete guide to conduct, let alone to life as a whole. And because of this, government can lay no valid claim to the wholeness which we require of the State. A man may be, in his conduct, 'within the law' without realizing or acting up to his full responsibilities as a member of his society. So long as we look upon a society as a collection of individuals and government as the 'primary organ' of its life, we shall misconceive its nature. Our society, the State, is 'a partnership in all science; a partnership in all art; a partnership in every virtue, and in all perfection',[21] its end is 'the excellence of souls',[22] and we can no more imagine this end achieved by means of government alone, or primarily by this means, than we can imagine 'Paradise Lost' achieved by a mere conformity to the rules of metrical composition. These rules, the elements of government, are meaningless unless we look at them as part of the larger whole, as vital though minor contributions to the end which of themselves they could not achieve; which, indeed, they are unable to touch or influence except indirectly through the medium of enforced behaviour.

To avoid unnecessary confusion perhaps it is wise to emphasize once more that I am not here speaking of this or that government, or this or that law, much less am I attempting to justify particular examples. This is an effort to envisage the principle of the possibility of government and its organ, law. By its light particular instances may be examined, perhaps judged, at all events, understood. But to reverse the process, to require a true theory to conform to not only every true example but also every apparent and pretending example, is demanding something which it is unable to supply. It can explain real things and place them within the system of their reasonableness; but all it can accomplish with regard to those things

[21] Burke, *Reflections*, i. 417. [Cp. p. 96, above.]

[22] Bosanquet, *Philosophical Theory of the State*, p. xxxix.

which contradict themselves and defeat their own existence, is to demonstrate the impossibility of their comprehension within a system of any sort or kind.

Conclusion

The proper conclusion to such an essay as I have made would be a theory of political life, fully worked out and comprehensively related to the rest of philosophy. This, however, I am unable to offer. Perhaps the only certain result of all my arguments is the inference that (in the words of Mr Pickwick) 'the word politics comprises, in itself, a difficult study of no inconsiderable magnitude.'[1] But even this seems to be somewhat in advance of the serene satisfaction with which modern social psychology and juristic theory promulgate their dicta on the nature of human life. My sole object in this essay has been to get a clearer view of the real nature of political philosophy, because it seems to me that this is a better approach than a ready acceptance of the questionable meanings which popular, legal, or any other specialized opinion has fastened upon the terms of this subject. In this attempt I have to a large extent failed. The real meaning of the things we call 'political' does not yet stand out with the clearness which I should wish.[2] But that, again, seems to me in some respects an advance upon the unexamined (except psychologically) preconceptions and assumptions of our 'political scientists'. At the outset I described my point of view by calling this an attempt to refocus the telescope of the mind upon the essential facts of political life. In consequence, all that I have said has been in terms of the problems which present themselves to our gaze, yet the problems themselves have nowhere been pushed forward for the sake of discovering their real nature. Hence the least valuable part of all that I have said is the provisional solutions I may have reached and been unable to conceal. Whatever these solutions may be, and however wrong-headed they may be, they do not affect the only argument to which I have given my full attention, viz., that *these* are the problems which are the business of political philosophy, and that it must take account of *this* aspect of things, and in *this* way.

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[1] [C. Dickens, *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club*, Ch. XV (London: E. Grattan, 1839), p. 155.]

[2] I have made a further attempt in my remarks on Sociality.

I am ready to abandon many of the conclusions here reached, but not the attitude with which I have tried to approach the subject—an attitude of doubt, and especially doubt concerning the value of the present legal and psychological tendencies of speculation on these topics. I am prepared to find that I have not penetrated far enough into the densely populated country of presupposition which lies behind everything we can think or say on this or any subject. If modern political science is building its stately edifice of statistics upon the sand, any conclusions I may have reached perhaps have a no firmer foundation. But one thing is certain, that the only sure basis of any study is one constructed out of examined preconceptions, and it is towards such a view of things that all my remarks must be taken to tend.

It is easy to fall into a jargon, a set way of thinking and speaking, and it is impossible to feel no sense of guilt in the too ready adoption of the conventional terms of a study. I have already given my reasons for not wishing to abandon all at once what may be called the 'old terminology'; but the further we press we are increasingly faced with the extreme difficulty of making ourselves understood except by repeated explanations of the exact meaning we imply in the use of each word. For example, it has occurred to me more than once that I have followed too blindly the conventional ruts of political science in including a separate section on Government. It is, of course, perfectly clear that to treat the State as a governmental area is no whit less absurd than to treat it as a geographical area. But beyond this a more subtle evaluation of its constitutive elements is necessary before we can properly judge the exact place which government can hold in a true theory of the social whole. That, for one reason or another, the place it has held in political theory is out of all comparison with its real importance, there can be small doubt. To make it an element of prime importance, as English thinkers have been apt to do, to say that no association is a state except it can show itself ruled by a government of a certain kind, would be paralleled in natural science by a refusal to believe that anything could come under the head of carbon which was not black. Just as

blackness is a feature of some forms of carbon and manifestly not a feature of other forms, so government is a feature of some modes of statehood, but not of others. The discovery, due in modern times to Jhering as much as to anyone else, that law is not a system of abstract principles but rests on [the] objective purpose to be served, should have enabled us to see mere government in a truer light than, for example, Hobbes or Hume or Locke could see it, but such hardly seems to be the present result. Nor have our modern juristic theorists advanced beyond the crude and absolute distinction, which we find, for instance, in Hume's essay, between governors and governed.[3] It seems probable that a true line of advance will lead at once to a view of government in which this distinction is abandoned as hopelessly at variance with the facts, and a more accurate assessment of the place which government holds as a single activity of a social whole. With the former, I believe, we shall come to see that the problem of government is a single manifestation of a much wider problem—the problem of education: and in consequence man's effort to solve it is recorded not merely in the history of law, but also in the history of education. When we see it whole, the great figures of educational speculation—Plato, Erasmus, Pestalozzi, Arnold, Thring, Montessori—will discover themselves as those who have attacked a problem one part of which we call 'government'. And with the latter will come the emancipation of political philosophy from the greatest disability under which it now suffers. But the wide-spread satisfaction with first principles as they are at present conceived prevents the necessary reexamination. This satisfaction must be shaken if we are to advance. Not that we are likely to achieve a state in which we make no presuppositions, but that a study founded upon unexamined preconceptions, which no one has troubled to question or doubt, is necessarily doomed to sterility and inconsequence.

Perhaps I shall be best able to point out the rough conclusions of this essay if I divide them into three heads, and make a few remarks about each in turn.

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[3] e.g., Laski, *Authority in the Modern State*, p. 22 [cp. p. 89, above].

1. The necessity of a better view of the nature of political philosophy.
2. The necessity of a metaphysical foundation to political philosophy.
3. The necessity of a thorough examination of the present position of the study, and the presuppositions on which it is based.

(1) I have already said most of what I think necessary about the nature of political philosophy. Putting aside the fact that to understand the things we call political is by no means so simple a task as is often supposed, it is equally important that we understand the exact nature, end, and possibilities of a philosophical theory. Upon this naturally depends our view of what is and what is not a contribution to political philosophy, as well as the validity of our own speculations. But in spite of the importance of clear ideas on this subject it seems to be one universally neglected. If I confine myself to remarks upon the history of political philosophy I can best illustrate what I mean. In his valuable *History of Aesthetic* Bosanquet takes up the point of view that much may be written about art which is not a contribution to Aesthetic, and this leads him to a division of his subject into three main heads. First, the works of art themselves, and the thoughts, feelings and experiences which they presuppose; secondly, what he calls 'criticism', which includes all writing about art the aim of which is either to improve it, give directions for the creation of works of art, or to describe individual productions; thirdly, aesthetic theory, the aim of which is neither to describe, to improve, or to direct, but simply to theorize, to put this art-experience into relation with the whole. This classification, of course, assumes a certain theory of what art is, and what a theory is, but this, so far from being an objection (as many would have it), shows its superiority over other and less critical views.

It is possible to approach other human experiences in the same way. Take morality and ethics, for instance. First we have moral experience; secondly the moralists, preachers and teachers who aim at producing a certain kind of morality, whose aim is therefore practical, creative or reformatory, and together with these we must

class all historians of moral opinion and those who wish to reveal its cause and origin; and thirdly, ethics, the theory of morals. This seems to me to put facts in some sort of rational order, which is a sine qua non of clear thinking on the subject.

And yet nine books out of ten on ethics or morals neither adopt this view of the nature of their subject, nor any other view at all. We have such phrases as '*ethical* purposes', 'the *ethics* of primitive man', and 'international *ethics*', none of which have any significance at all if ethics is the theory of morals. There are *moral* purposes, and we are trying to build up an international *morality*. Even D'Arcy in his excellent *Short Study of Ethics* shows an insecure grasp of this difference between ethics and morality.[4] While the most striking contemporary instance is to be found in Schweitzer's *Civilization and Ethics*, where the entire conclusions of the book rest upon the uncertain basis of a confusion on on this point. He presents us with a new morality, not a new ethic.[5] This misuse of words is, no doubt, in part the legacy of the nineteenth century 'ethical movement', just as Aesthetic suffered by the 'aesthetic movement' of the same period. If it went no further than a matter of words not much harm would have been done, but as a matter of *fact* it has succeeded in perverting the entire outlook of many of the most influential writers.

When we come to political philosophy things are in a still worse state. The latest plan for reorganizing human society, for inaugurating an international government, for industrial organization, or for town planning is hailed as a contribution to political philosophy. Plato and Aristotle, Dante and Luther, Suarez and Bonald, Hegel, G.D.H. Cole and Patrick Geddes are alike spoken of as political philosophers. University courses treat Hegel

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[4] [C.F. D'Arcy, *A Short Study of Ethics* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1895)]

[5] A. Schweitzer, *Civilization and Ethics*, tr. J. Nash (London: A. & C. Black, Ltd., 1923). ['The ideal of the civilized man is nothing else than that of the man who demonstrates and practises the truly humane nature in all the relations of life', p. 282.]

and Maine, Bosanquet and Dicey, as if they were writing about the same subject in the same way. And what is worst of all, genuine contributions to the philosophy of political life are judged as if they were contributions to psychology of law, sociology, or the so-called 'science' of government. It seems to me of the utmost importance that this confusion should be faced and dispelled; and the means of doing so are ready to hand. The raw material of political philosophy is political life; from that we may pass to the vast literature of utopias and practical suggestions in government and social organization, of political criticism and political reform, of law and jurisprudence, of history and party controversy. But apart from all this is the genuine literature of political philosophy. These distinctions are useful, nay, absolutely necessary, yet when they are made we cannot pretend that all our troubles will be over.

It is easy enough to pick out examples to suit our classification. On the one side we have such a piece of political criticism as Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy*, on the other, Hegel's *Philosophie des Rechts*; or again, Mr Graham Wallas's interesting excursions into social psychology, and Green's *Lectures on Political Obligation*. But what are we to say about Plato's *Republic*, Spinoza's *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, or Rousseau's *Contrat social*? Can we fit them into the class of political criticism or into that of political theory? It is obvious that none of these works (and there are many others in like case) conform in the most obvious way to our system of classification. They are at once works of criticism and of theory: just as Butler's *Sermons* are at once moral criticism and ethic, and Pater's *Renaissance* a contribution to history and criticism and at the same time an excursion into aesthetic.[6]

[6] [The first reference is probably to Joseph Butler's widely read 'Fifteen Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel' (1726); many editions, e.g. *Butler's Fifteen Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel; and, a Dissertation of the Natureof Virtue*, edited with an introduction and additional notes by T.A. Roberts (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1970). The reference to Walter Pater is to *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1873). Three subsequent editions were entitled *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*.]

With such examples before us it would be futile to object to this procedure, but we should be careful to note that, unlike many modern works which incorporate practical suggestions and a practical purpose with a theoretical treatment, Plato and Spinoza and Rousseau are under no delusion as to what they are doing. They are aware that they have a double purpose and are careful not to confuse themselves and others in the way they treat it. With them we are left in no doubt as to when they are making a practical suggestion for social organization and when they are formulating a theory of social life, and they do not use arguments for the one end which are admissible only in support of the other.

Plato has before him the State of Athens as he knows it. He wishes to point out its defects and to put people into the way of reorganizing it on a surer political foundation. Behind these suggestions lies Plato's view (theory) of what a State is, and he develops the two purposes side by side. But he avoids committing the blunder of thinking it necessary that his theory should conform to every appearance of fact which any of his hearers may like to produce against him, and he avoids also the notion that the end of a theory of politics is to *judge* the different historical systems of government and social organization.

Our classification, then, is one which applies primarily to the subject-matter itself of our study and only secondarily to literary works. But the best literature of the subject observes its essentials even when, from a more superficial point of view, it seems to take leave of it. But when we turn to more modern writers we discover a very different state of affairs. Throughout Mr Laski's work, for instance, runs this double strain of political criticism and attempted theory of political life, but the two purposes are confused in sucha way as to vitiate most of his remarks on both. At one moment he is objecting to a theory of political life because it does not afford him sufficient basis for *judging* actual political systems: 'our political systems must be judged not merely by the ends they serve, but also by the way in which they serve those ends'.[7] And at another he is

[7] Laski, *Foundations of Sovereignty*, p. 248.

using a criterion suitable for testing a practical programme in order to prove a theoretical position: 'We shall find, I think, that there is one best method of considering our problem. Suppose that on the one hand we adopt the monist solution, what concrete difference will that make to our political life? If we are pluralists, how does that affect our activities? What, in short, are the consequences of our attitude? It is from them we may deduce its truth.'[8]

And in these errors of logic Mr Laski does not stand alone. Mr Hobhouse, for example, thinks he has put forward a real objection to the Hegelian theory of the State simply by saying that 'it was designed to turn the edge of the principle of freedom by identifying freedom with law."[9] This, indeed, might be a ground for refusing to live in an Hegelian state, but it is no ground at all for objecting to a theory of the State. And if it should happen that Hegel is right, Mr Hobhouse is performing the heroic task of registering a protest against the universe. Further examples are unnecessary. My point is, that until we possess a truer view of our subject-matter we are not likely to make any notable contribution to our study. And the failure of late years to produce anything of prime importance in political theory is largely owing to this refusal to discover the limits and ends of a theory and what is its relation to purposes of practical reform.

There is another subject which requires a thorough treatment before we can arrive at a true philosophy of political life: we must discover the exact relation of political philosophy to ethics. And we shall be in a position to do this only when we have formulated some clear ideas on the nature of political philosophy and on the nature of ethics. I do not propose to discuss this matter now, but it is my belief that it is only a wrong view of the nature of political life, and a wrong view of the nature of the self, which has created and perpetuated the notion that there is any difference at all

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[8] Laski, *Problem of Sovereignty*, p. 3.

[9] L.T. Hobhouse, *Principles of Sociology*, 5 vols (London: Routledge/Thoemmes, 1996 [1918]), vol. 1, *The Metaphysical Theory of the State A Criticism*, p. 24.

between political philosophy and ethics, just as it is an erroneous and untenable view of the self which perpetuates the distinction between 'individual' and 'social' psychology. And we can count it hardly short of monstrous that writers who have gained the position of recognized authorities on this subject, can cover up their failure properly to think out this relation by retailing to us stale nonsense about political philosophy being 'applied ethics'.

(2) One of my main objects has been to show clearly what is the nature of the presuppositions which all political theorists make and must make. I have not been able to catalogue them and examine them one by one—such a useful piece of work is quite beyond me. But I have tried to call attention to the particular *class* of presupposition which we are most in danger of forgetting. They are not sociological, nor psychological, but logical and metaphysical. Again and again in the course of our discussion it has become clear that all political philosophy depends upon a view of the universe, and so on a metaphysic. It is unnecessary for me to say that all that I have said rests upon certain views about the nature of truth, knowledge, the good, and reality, for that is obvious on every page. What I wish to make clear is that here I attach no importance whatever to these views (which I have introduced only in order to show that *some* metaphysical basis is necessary).

My sole object is to point out that a political philosophy founded upon no metaphysical prolegomenon, or upon one fundamentally in error, is doomed to propagate not truth, but falsehood. As things are at present the psychologists and legalists are so firmly in possession of this field of study that there is an immediate presumption against any attempt to build up a politics upon a sound philosophical basis. 'All this is metaphysics, you cry. That is enough; there needs nothing more to give a strong presumption of falsehood' said Hume,[10] and the situation is not far other to-day. But, as a matter of fact, I repeat, all the most important questions of political philosophy

[10] D. Hume, *An Enquiry concerning the Human Understanding, and An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1894), p. 289.

are solved or mis-solved while we are still engaging our minds with metaphysics. The real antagonism between Hegel and Hobhouse is in the realm of logic,[11] and that between Bosanquet and Laski lies in the fact that the former has a view of the universe, a theory of truth and reality, which the latter neither holds, understands, nor replaces by another.[12]

With certain writers it has long been a practice to retail an ethic unfounded upon anything save perhaps a rather fanciful biology, and some even have attempted to justify this procedure. But it should be clear enough that upon the threshold of ethics lie a number of perplexing questions whose nature is best described as metaphysical. If this is not obvious at the outset, it should speedily become so either by a consideration of the treatment which the outstanding works in the history of philosophy have given to the theory of morals, or from a review of the necessary preliminaries to a theory of anything whatever. That a theory must be founded upon a sound logic, that a logic involves[13] a view of the nature of truth and reality—a metaphysic—should need no demonstration, and it is difficult to see on what grounds a theory of morals should be excluded from this necessity. That an exception should be made in favour of the theory of political life is equally puzzling and even more frequent.

I have endeavoured to show that in the philosophy of political life there are but two chapters—the one entitled, the State; the other, the Self—and that these two are finally one. It has been thought that the State and the Self are two things. The whole was considered as a stick in which the self is the handle by which we grasp our

[11] Mr Hobhouse is in a singular position. He tells us that he spent long years thrashing out his metaphysical position, and that his view of the nature of reality and truth is not far other than that of Hegel or Bradley. But when he comes to discuss morals, the nature of the State, and political life, all his metaphysics desert him, and his mind is given up to the undisputed sway of anthropology and the 'politics' of the moment.

[12] Roughly speaking, Mr Laski's metaphysics seems to be a *réchauffé* of Jamesian pragmatism in its crudest form.

[13] [Oakeshott's marginal note: 'is?']

position in our social whole, but now we are beginning to see that this wand of political life is embossed by no handle of a self, but is all of a piece. To approach it from the end of the self leads to the state, and vice versa. Self and state are aspects of a single entity. Such a position, and indeed any position we may choose to adopt with regard to this question, rests entirely upon a view of the nature of the self.

'Now, do you conceive it possible,' asks Socrates, 'to comprehend satisfactorily the nature of the soul without comprehending the nature of the universe?'[14] And Phaedrus can but answer, 'Nay.' If to understand man and his nature we must connect him with the universe of which he is a part and with the world to which he belongs and must prove this connection necessary, it is the problem itself which compels a metaphysical discussion. For the real question is, What is involved in this experience we call political life? And while it is the writers who see most clearly the impossibility either of building a sound political philosophy in the air or of deciding these metaphysical and logical problems by anything other than metaphysical and logical discussions who have contributed most helpfully to the study of political philosophy, it is those who have failed to recognize these necessities who have performed the signal service of confusing the issues and darkening the problems so that the study at the present time is little better than a treacherous morass whose paths have been obliterated by the repeated and aimless tramplings of so many purposeless arguments and inconsequent controversies.

(3) Any possibility of contributing usefully to the study of political philosophy must depend upon our ability to speak in a language which can be understood, and this necessitates a full understanding of the present position of the subject. Whatever are the conclusions we wish to reach, the way in which we express them must be governed by the presuppositions which those who are at present hold the field are in the habit of making. If we disagree, as I think we are fully justified in doing, with the general point of

[14] Plato, *Phaedrus*, 270 [tr. J. Wright, op. cit., p. 77].

view which the distinctively modern political theorists adopt, we must *start* from their position and question their attitude. It is more difficult in philosophy than in natural science to discover any kind of corporate advance in the study, but for all that it does not consist in merely a repetition of old ideas without any advance towards a more settled state of mind. The problems which we must attack are those which faced Plato and Spinoza, and it should at least be clear by this time that some methods of approach will lead only to disappointment and delusion. Radical fallacies are from time to time exposed, but it is no easy matter to throw off an attitude of mind. The fact which we must face is that the unpleasant scent of the outworn rags of nineteenth century materialism (which was anything but philosophical), and the musty odour of nineteenth century biological theories, still cling about our political speculations as the stale stench of last night's cigars permeates the unaired breakfastroom. Theology has long been under the cloud of the so-called historical method, but is now beginning to free itself; while political philosophy seems only to be advancing further into this morass of baseless conjecture. And the way in which it stretches out its hands to cling to each new fad of the populus—'the unconscious mind', 'the herd instinct', 'crowd suggestion' and the rest—calls to mind the actions of a drowning man. In the scientific and historical discoveries of the nineteenth century and the attitude of mind which they subsequently engendered is to be discovered the foundation of the position in which we now find ourselves, and in tracing these antecedents we shall be in a better position to understand and judge that which (we must admit) it is impossible suddenly to abolish.

We must admit also that Europe is at present hardly in a position to enter upon that enquiry which alone can form a secure basis for a philosophy of political life. For a purely theoretical treatment of such subjects we have been accustomed to look to Germany, but the present state of that country forbids us to hope for anything of that nature in the near future. An excellent illustration of this is afforded by the work of Troeltsch whose post-war speculations bear

the mark of that practical reconstruction, as distinct from a theory of the whole and for its own sake, which his country is called upon to make in its social life and governmental organization:

> *nam neque nos agere hoc patriai tempore iniquo*
> *possumus aequo animo*[15]

From France we can expect little either. French political writers, like those of America, have for the last twenty years given themselves over to the Sociology which consists in the collection and partial assimilation of vast masses of data from which it is hoped a science of society may eventually appear. The monumental works of modern political thought are the *Sociological Review*, originally inspired by Le Play and his school of social enquiry, and the *Political Science Quarterly* with its immense record of work on statistical methods and the science of government and administration which has been carried out in America. One of the most interesting books from America of late is Miss Follett's *Creative Experience* in which she gives an admirable review of what she believes the present position to be, and it is not one which offers much hope for the immediate future.[16] These activities, however, do not pretend to give us a political theory and so do not themselves endanger the formation of such a theory on its true basis. The disquieting feature which they disclose is that men's interests and endeavours are largely turned in a direction away from a true theory. In England matters are somewhat different. Those writers who speak so much of the 'naturalistic' and the 'realistic' theory of the state which they offer us, not only (by their method of approach) demonstrate the moribund condition of true theoretical enquiry, but prove themselves more subtle enemies by pretending to give us that for which we are looking. When we ask for the real thing they do not refuse us, but give us—a serpent. For that political thought which I have called characteristically

[15] Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, I. 41–2. [Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, p. 5: 'For neither can we pursue our task with tranquil mind, in this untranquil time of our country.'

[16] M.P. Follett, *Creative Experience* (London; New York: Longman's, Green & Co., 1930 [1924]).

modern is neither political (in the true sense), nor is it thought,[17] and the general tendency of the present day seems to me to be based upon a radical misconception of the nature of the study. However, it is no part of my intention in this place to present a review of the position in which we find ourselves, though this seems to me the most pressing of our needs. Before any convincing advance can be made it is necessary to take stock of present tendencies and prevailing notions, and this will be best accomplished by a critical review of the writings of those who have established themselves as the leaders of this branch of research.

The reader of these scattered notes will have looked in vain for any real unity of treatment, and while they are by no means free from internal contradiction, they make no pretence at a comprehensive review of the subject; and so it will not surprise him if I offer no better conclusion than this—which is at best a wall-end left irregular and unbeautiful, with the scaffolding still in its place, so that the looker-on shall be in no doubt as to its incompleteness, and the author under no delusion as to the finality of his remarks.

August 1925

[17] See p. 65, n. 17, above.

Part 2: The Philosophical Approach to Politics

What is Political Philosophy?

1. There exist a number of books which by their titles purport to be philosophical theories of politics, or, which comes to the same thing, criticisms of philosophical theories. For, you will see, unless a criticism of a philosophical theory is itself philosophical it will not be a very valuable criticism. Aristotle's *Politics*, Hobbes' *Leviathan*, Rousseau's *Contrat social*, and Green's *Lectures on Political Obligation* are books of this kind.

2. I shall assume that, either as a matter of interest, or for some less good reason, a good many of you have from time to time tried to read some of these books; and it is safe to say that you probably found them hard going. Some of them to ordinary readers like ourselves appear to be just nonsense, or, at any rate, we are often at a loss to find their significance. We ask ourselves of this or that writer, 'What is he getting at?', and we are no nearer to answering the question at the end of his book than we were at the beginning. We take up these books and try to judge them by ordinary standards, and our conclusion is that *either* they are something new, the like of which we have not previously come across, *or* they are just nonsense.

3. This, I imagine, will have been the experience of most of you if you have happened upon Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*. The book has troubled a great many people since it was written just over 100 years ago. And I suppose the most general conclusion about it is that it is nonsense, or something perilously near to being nonsense. Usually, in an attempt to put some meaning into it, those who have been more kindly disposed towards Hegel have regarded it as simply a rather poor attempt to advertise the Prussian state at the end of the eighteenth century. Here is the first paragraph.

> The completely free will, when it is conceived abstractly, is in a condition of self-involved simplicity. What actuality it has when taken in this abstract way, consists in a negative attitude towards reality, and a bare abstract reference of itself to itself. Such an abstract will is the individual will of a subject. It, as particular,

> has definite ends, and, as exclusive and individual, has these ends before itself as an externally and directly presented world.[1]

And we come to the conclusion that if this is a philosophy of politics, then, philosophy is, as Michelet remarked, merely a matter of 'Losing one's way methodically', it is a conscientious attempt to look at things upside down.[2] We say to ourselves, either *nonsense* or *new*. But probably the most profitable thing to do is to say *either*, 'This does not interest me', and go no further with it, *or* 'This interests me', and then try and find some standard by which to judge it.

4. The fact of the matter is, that unless we have some idea of the *kind of thing* a writer on the philosophy of politics is driving at we shall entirely misunderstand what he says. Of course, he has his duty to his readers. 'The philosophical writer', says Schopenhauer, 'is a guide and his reader is an explorer. If they are to go together they must *start* together; that is, the writer must take up a point of view which he has in common with the reader.'[3] But if the reader is not prepared to go somewhere where he has not been before, they can't expect to more than *start* together.

And what I want to do in these lectures is to try and discover the point of view of a writer of this sort, because if we can grasp his point of view we shall be in less danger of making ourselves absurd in what we say about him; for, you know, philosophers are not the only people who talk nonsense. If a great deal of so-called political philosophy is nonsense, it is also true that almost all the so-called criticisms of political philosophies are mere absurdities, because they fail at the outset to understand the nature of the subject itself.

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[1] G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right,* §34, p. 43.

[2] [Possibly Karl Ludwig Michelet (1801–93), Hegel's successor as Professor of Philosophy at the University of Berlin, but the quotation has not been traced.]

[3] Schopenhauer, 'On Philosophy and its Method', in *Parerga*, ii. 6. [Oakeshott's translation, which may be his own, refers to Schopenhauer, '*Über Philosophie und ihre Methode*', in *Sämtliche Werke*, 6 vols (Leipzig, F.A. Brockhaus, 1939 [1873–4]), vi. 6.]

These critics think they can usefully criticize a philosophical theory without being themselves philosophical or even knowing what philosophy is.

You will, I think, find that this is so with almost everything Professor Laski has ever written about political philosophies. And it is certainly the main defect of Hobhouse's book, *The Metaphysical Theory of the State*. There are very few controversies in political philosophy to-day in which the antagonists are playing the same game. The one man is playing chess, his adversary is playing against him at billiards; and whenever a victory is achieved, or a defeat sustained, it is always such a victory as a billiard-player might be supposed to gain over a chess-player, or such a defeat as a billiard-player might be supposed to sustain at the hands of a chess-player. These incongruous contests are entirely attributable to the circumstances that political philosophy has not been reasoned out from the bottom, and that the disputants have no common question before them on which they have joined issue.

5. So, I do not want to try to give you a political philosophy, for I haven't one to give. I want to give you some sort of familiarity with the point of view of political philosophy in general, and so work out some kind of criterion for judging a philosophical theory of politics. And, in the end, we may find ourselves in a slightly better position to understand, criticize, or construct a philosophy of politics for ourselves.

6. If you will allow me, then, I will not begin dogmatically by saying that philosophy consists in looking at things upside down, nor is it advisable, at first, to think of a philosopher as, it has been said, 'a blind man in a dark room looking for a black cat which isn't there'. All that may turn out to be true in the end; but it will be more reasonable to start by supposing that philosophy is something, and therefore something, in some respects, different from other things. And if it takes us all our time to distinguish exactly what a philosophical theory of politics is, you must not mind that. Because, I may tell you, if you found out *that* you would have found out a

good deal more than a great many writers on the subject. Our aim, then, is simply to try and see clearly what are the requirements of a philosophical theory of politics, to answer the question, What is a political philosophy anyway?

7. But there are many difficulties; and about one of them I must warn you. I should like to say that the whole of what I am going to tell you is uncontroversial, true for all philosophical theories that have ever been put forward; but that is impossible. It is a peculiarity of philosophy, that to give even the baldest account of it is to take up a position. For example, the question, 'What is Botany?' is not one of the controversial questions which worry botanists and give them sleepless nights. But in philosophy we are met at the door with the question, 'What is philosophy?'; and it is not too much to say that if you could answer it fully you would have done all that there is to do in philosophy. And so, in trying to see clearly what a philosophical theory of politics is, we are really starting out on an attempt to make a political philosophy.

This, perhaps, appears rather absurd to you. The very idea of a number of people first calling themselves philosophers and then going about the world asking themselves and their friends what philosophy is, is absurd enough to lead us back to our opinion that philosophy is only looking at things upside down. But don't be led! That's mere impatience! Or, if you prefer, why not try and see what things look like upside down? There was a French painter who discovered that all the colours of the landscape seemed brighter and more interesting when he looked at them standing on his head, so he always painted pictures looking between his legs. So, even if we do not always look at things upside down, it is at least worthwhile discovering *how* different they look from that position. And, if we look a little closer, this is not all quite so absurd as it seems at first sight.

It is true that botanists do not think about botany, but about plants, that historians do not think about history but about events and characters, that poets do not think about poetry but about their experiences, but does that mean that no one is to be allowed to

think about thinking, to turn thought back upon itself? You may think it unprofitable, but it is not entirely nonsensical. If there were no plants there could be no botany; and if no one ever thought there could be no philosophy, in a double sense—there would be no subject or object for philosophy—no thinking person to think about his thought.

And so, if you have discovered fully what philosophy is you have come to a conclusion on a great number of questions which are usually called philosophical questions. To put it another way: in philosophy it is impossible to divide in order to conquer, it is impossible to take one thing at a time, simply because a full answer to any one question implies a certain answer to all other questions. So, in what I have to say I cannot help adopting a position, I cannot help making controversial statements, *you* would probably say I cannot help being prejudiced.

8. Now the favourite way of getting some sort of clear idea of what a philosophical theory of politics is, and what, in general, philosophy is, is to go to the so-called history of philosophy and see what it can tell us. You will see, of course, that this is really a very wrong-headed way of going about it, for unless we know what philosophy is, unless we have a fairly clear idea of its aims and results, the history of philosophy must remain for us a blank,—we don't know what it is the history of which we are studying. The history of a subject is necessarily intimately connected with the conception which is formed of it. But, if we treat it warily, I think the history of philosophy, even in this very abstract sense, has something to *suggest* to us, and it will be worthwhile to start by seeing what it has to say.

9. The word philosophy, as it first appears in Greek, is equivalent simply to our word *curiosity*. It meant curiosity about anything and everything.[4] Of the writings of the so-called philosophers of

[4] [Oakeshott's note reads: 'Solon and Croesus. Herodotus. I. 14', probably a reference to Herodotus, *Histories*, tr. G. Rawlinson (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1992 [1910]), p. 16, where Croesus begins his address to Solon: 'Stranger of Athens, we have heard much of thy wisdom and of

that early period all that has come down to us are mere fragments preserved as quotations in later works. But we can see that what was valued were simply the *opinions* of those writers, opinions on all sorts of subjects. Anaximander said that 'the moon was a ring eighteen times the size of the earth'. Thales said that 'the Earth floats on water'. Heraclitus said that 'the dry soul is the wisest and best'. And we are seldom, if ever, told the reasons which lay behind these sayings. Philosophy, then, as we first meet the word in history means first a curious search after knowledge and secondly a set of opinions about anything whatsoever. Intellectual pursuits are quite undifferentiated; they were all just knowledge, curiosity.

But, in the course of time 'philosophy' began to mean something more definite and limited. Plato's , it is true, is the man who has by nature the appetite for learning anything and everything, but the word philosophy was beginning to be a technical expression, meaning very much what we mean by 'science' when we use the word loosely,—something systematic and reasoned, something the opposite of arbitrary and capricious. So when Plato says that there will be no end to the evil of human life until either kings become philosophers or philosophers become kings, we must not read into it any of our modern meanings of 'philosophy'. Plato meant by a philosopher a man who had a disinterested, judicious, scientific outlook, an expert in his particular line. Plato, as you know, was all for government by experts, and that is all he means by a philosopher-king.

With Aristotle a great change begins; and what we, nowadays, mean by the word philosophy has been influenced by him more than by anyone else.[5] Aristotle 'was primarily a man not only of remarkable but universal intelligence; and universal intelligence

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thy travels through many lands, from love of knowledge and a wish to see the world.']

[5] See Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Bk A ch ii, 982b (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1960 [1952]), p. 7. ['This science is the theory of first principles and reasons, among which is the good or the wherefor.'; tr. R. Hope.]

means that he could apply his intelligence to anything. The ordinary intelligence is good for certain classes of objects; a brilliant man of science, if he is interested in poetry at all, may conceive grotesque judgments: he may like one poet because he reminds him of himself, or another because he expresses emotions which he admires … But Aristotle had none of these impure desires to satisfy; in whatever sphere of interest, he looked solely and steadfastly at the object.'[6] He was interested in everything, he wrote or lectured on a great many different subjects—theology, ethics, logic, rhetoric, physics, biology, psychology, the science of government, poetry and literature—and he was known to the ages which came after him as a philosopher, as *the* philosopher.

And so, what should be more natural than to suppose that everything in which Aristotle was interested was in fact 'philosophy'? The science or art of medicine was the sole exception: Galen says that Hippocrates separated medicine from philosophy. But with this exception, right down to the eighteenth century the word 'philosophy' is ordinarily used for any, roughly-speaking, 'scientific' curiosity or knowledge. Aristotle himself, it is true, differentiated more than his predecessors between his intellectual interests, but on the whole his influence, or that of his editors, has been on the side of 'philosophy' as the undifferentiated whole of human knowledge or effort after knowledge.[7]

In the later Greek age and with the Romans 'philosophy' was given an additional meaning; it was thought of as including religion also. Epicureanism and Stoicism were creeds, ways of life, and also

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[6] T.S. Eliot, *The Sacred Wood Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1920), pp. 9–10.

[7] [Oakeshott's reference to 'Haskins on Mediaeval philosophy' may be to C.H. Haskins, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927), pp. 307, 341: 'Twelfth century … habits of thought … were to persist until the seventeenth century and even later … in most mediaeval classifications of knowledge science was only a branch of philosophy … Aristotle … mingled the two in the almost universal cyclopedia of his writings.']

'philosophies'. This is admirably described in Pater's *Marius the Epicurean*, for example.

The Middle Ages carried on what I have called the Aristotelian tradition—philosophy meaning the whole range and also every separate department of, knowledge, or research. Albertus Magnus, Abelard, the Alchemists, Roger Bacon were all philosophers. The 'philosopher's stone' was that which would turn everything it touched to gold.

What we call modern philosophy begins in the sixteenth century. And its characteristic is that it introduces a firmer and more logical differentiation of intellectual interests, *one* of which is philosophy; instead of philosophy being the name for all in general. But progress in this direction was very slow and had many setbacks; in fact the movement which began with Descartes to free philosophy, not only from theology and the domination of the church, but also from the hampering influence of other intellectual interests and points of view, is not yet completed. The sixteenth century saw also the beginnings of what we have now come to call Natural Science, and it seems to have been more or less inevitable that modern philosophy and modern science, both struggling against the dead hand of ecclesiastical prejudice, should find common cause, and should for a century or two longer remain confused.

At any rate that is what happened. The astronomer Galileo was thought of as a 'philosopher', Leibnitz was equally a philosopher in producing his theory of monads and in his invention of the Calculus, Newton's great work was called 'the mathematical principles of natural philosophy', and we have only to turn to Shakespeare and Sir Thomas Browne to discover the way in which the sixteenth-seventeenth centuries commonly used the word.

This way of looking at things lasted longer in England than in some other European countries. At the end of the eighteenth century Hegel in his lectures on the *History of Philosophy* can still laugh at the English because we called the barometer and thermometer 'philosophical instruments'. And indeed this terminology has lasted on to the present day. Canning in an after-dinner speech could speak

of 'the philosophic principles of government',[8] the Philosophical Society in Cambridge to-day is one exclusively interested in what we call the Natural Sciences, and philosophy is spoken of as 'Moral Science'.

But with the great age of German philosophy, during the second half of the eighteenth century, a change was taking place. Nobody would think of abasing, wholesale, all intellectual interests and pursuits, of pouring scorn on all curiosity and effort after knowledge, and yet it was becoming the fashion, a fashion which has lasted on to our own day, of abusing a body of people called 'philosophers'. A change had evidently taken place. Philosophy was becoming a particular intellectual pursuit, and one, apparently, by common consent, which was both unprofitable and vain.

'All this is metaphysics, you say', remarks Hume in one of his books, 'and there needs nothing more to give it a strong presumption of falsity.'[9] If philosophy were simply a matter of curiosity about everything as it was to the Greeks, if it were simply, as Novalis said, 'getting rid of your phlegm',[10] then no-one would be so senseless as to abuse it in the wholesale manner in which philosophy has been

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[8] [This anecdote is related in Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, i. 58.]

[9] [Oakeshott is paraphrasing Hume's *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*; see p. 135 n. 9, above.]

[10] [R. Stern, *Hegelian Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 173 nn. 88–90, traces the quotation '*Philosophiren ist dephlegmatisiren—vivificiren*' to Novalis, '*Logologischen Fragmenten*', no. 15, in *Schriften. Die Werke Friedrich von Hardenbergs*, ed. P. Luckhorn and R. Samuel, 6 vols, 3rd edn (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1977–), ii. 256, and notes that it was cited in both B. Bosanquet, *The Principle of Individuality and Value The Gifford Lectures for 1911 Delivered in Edinburgh University* (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1912), pp. 60–1, and Nettleship, *Remains*, i. 126, where it is paraphrased as 'to philosophize is to get rid of one's phlegm'. Its usage in W. Pater, *The Renaissance* (London: Fontana Library, 1967 [1873]), p. 222, appears to have predated both, though Oakeshott was familiar with all three possible sources.]

abused during the past century, no-one would say of it, as Michelet did, that it was just 'methodically losing one's way'. This suspicion is evidence of the existence of some particular kind of knowledge which is now called 'philosophy'.

Best illustration of the change. Compare Plato and Hegel on the Philosopher-King. Either they meant the same thing and disagreed, or they meant different things by 'philosopher' and did not necessarily disagree. Now, Hegel's view of 'philosophy' was that it was of no practical use, that the great ages of philosophy came after an age of practical activity. And his view of government was much the same as Plato's. So they do not disagree. It is simply that Plato has one meaning for philosopher and Hegel another. Plato thinks of him as an expert in practical life and government: Hegel thinks of him as an expert in a particular kind or way of thinking. 'The owl of Minerva takes its flight only when the shades of night are gathering.'[11]

Illogically enough, even among those who are most abusive of this thing called 'philosophy', it is not always admitted that it really exists as a separate intellectual interest with a point of view peculiar to it, with individual aims and perhaps individual results. All studies have been slow to recognize their own limits, that is, to discover themselves. 'Philosophy' once included 'natural science' and now many are wanting to merge philosophy into natural science and will admit it no separate existence. Religion once dominated philosophy, and now some philosophers are telling us what we ought to believe, are making religion a part of philosophy.

Both these conflicts have a long history which we need not go into. The view which I wish to put before you is that philosophy is something different from religion, different from natural science, having characteristics and an individuality of its own. You may think that all that I have been telling you is simply a matter of words, of terminology, but what I wish to make as clear as I can is that it is a matter of meanings and not words, of *things*, if you like. And this will, I hope, become clearer as we go on.

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[11] Hegel, 'Preface' to *Philosophy of Right*, p. xxx.

10. Perhaps you are wondering what all this has to do with a philosophical theory of politics. What I have been doing is trying to make as good [an] attempt as I can to start at the beginning so that we can, as Schopenhauer said, *start together*. How are we to discover what a philosophical theory of politics is, when we do not yet know what philosophy is? The conclusion which this history of philosophy suggests, then, is this. In its early days philosophy was just knowledge about anything and everything; now, it has come to mean a particular kind of knowledge, to be distinguished from other kinds and to be freed from the illusory obligations of conforming to the standards and criteria of other kinds of knowledge.

Or, perhaps, to call it knowledge is going further than we need. Philosophy is a particular kind of *thinking*, different from other kinds, and yet, naturally, having characteristics in common with every sort of activity which can be properly called thinking. There is a passage in the *Phaedrus* of Plato where Socrates says:

on every subject, my friend, there is but one mode of beginning for those who would deliberate well. They must know what the thing is on which they are deliberating, or else of necessity go altogether astray. Most men, however, are blind to the fact that they are ignorant of the essential character of each individual thing. Fancying, therefore, that they possess this knowledge, they come to no mutual understanding at the outset of their enquiry; and in the sequel they exhibit the natural consequence, an inconsistency with themselves and with each other.[12] Philosophy is something, and therefore something different from other things. A philosophical theory of politics is something, and therefore something different from any other kind of theory of politics. Philosophy is thinking, a particular kind of thinking, and a philosophical theory of politics is a particular kind or way of thinking about politics. These are our suggested conclusions, and what we have now to discover is, What is its particularity? How does it differ from other kinds of thinking? In short, what is it?

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[12] Plato, *Phaedrus*, 237b–c [tr. J. Wright, op. cit., pp. 18–19. Cp. p. 39 n. 1, above].

The General Nature of Thinking and Philosophy

1. The conclusion, if we may call it such, of the last lecture was that philosophy is something and not just anything. Not a very startling conclusion, you may say, but one,I believe, which, if we follow it out to the end, would knock the bottom out of a good deal of what is called political philosophy to-day. For, nowadays, the latest plan for reorganizing human society, for inaugurating an international government, for disestablishing the church, or for town planning is hailed as a contribution to 'political philosophy'. Now, there will no doubt be a suspicion at the back of your minds that this is all a matter of words, of names; and I hope you will keep that suspicion alive, for there is nothing more profitless or puerile than a dispute about mere names. But anything more than a first look at the position will show that what we have here is a confusion of *things* and not of words. When a writer on jurisprudence or anthropology is regarded as having criticized, perhaps even refuted, a writer on the philosophy of politics, there exists a confusion of *things* similar to that which would exist if a billiard player, playing billiards, were thought to defeat a chess-player playing chess.

2. Philosophy, then, is something different from other things. But you will remember that this conclusion was only a *suggested* conclusion, suggested by the history of philosophy, and not a *proved* conclusion. And our first business this morning is to make this conclusion a little clearer, a little more significant, a little more concrete, and a little less abstract. We must give it a *logical* basis instead of a merely *historical* one. The word 'philosophy' I have mentioned often enough, but as yet we know very little of its significance; we must establish a conception of philosophy, and so of political philosophy, scientifically and not arbitrarily.

3. Let us, then, start with the abstract and general conception of philosophy as *thinking*, as thinking with a view to the discovery of *truth*. And we can make this idea less abstract and more concrete only by giving some clear and definite meaning to these words

'thinking' and 'truth'. Only then shall we begin to see what this particular thing we call 'philosophy' is.

4. Perhaps the most elementary kind of thinking we know of goes under the name of *Perception*; in fact, it is so elementary that we commonly deny that it is thinking at all. When I say, 'This is a book', or 'I see a book' or 'A book lies before me' we are apt to think of it as an 'immediate perception'. But this is an illusion. What has really happened is that I have brought to bear my past experience upon a certain object which is before me, or, in other words, what appeared to be a matter of mere sensation, turns out to be a matter of thinking. It is a process of thought which attributes the name book to the object I see. The word 'book' means something to me only because I can connect it with some past experience, and this can only be done by what we call a process of thought. We may think very *quickly* sometimes, but we none the less do *think*. Perception, then, is a kind of thinking.

5. On the other hand, when I say, 'I believe in the immortality of the soul', or 'We ought to be kind to one another', these, also, are conclusions reached by thinking. And yet, clearly, they are not the results of exactly the same kind of thinking as the observation 'This is a book'. Here, then, is our problem; clearly there are kinds of thinking and how are we to distinguish between them? We said, provisionally, that philosophy was a kind of thinking directed towards the discovery of truth, but are not our perceptual judgments, our religious judgments, our moral judgments also directed towards the discovery of truth? So it appears that we have before us a number of kinds of thinking, and also a number of kinds of truth. How are we to distinguish them?

6. This, as you know, is not a new problem; it is as old as philosophy. And it has received many solutions. Perhaps the simplest one is that which differentiates between kinds of thought by saying that each kind of thinking is the activity of a separate and particular faculty. And naturally there goes with this the notion that each kind of thinking results in its own particular kind of truth. So there are as

many faculties as there are kinds of thinking, and as many kinds of truth as there are faculties,—and all entirely independent of one another. This was once called the common-sense view of the matter, and it is certainly simplicity itself, because if at any time we discover a new kind of thinking we shall have no trouble in fitting it into the scheme of things, for all we need say of it is, 'Here is another independent kind of thinking, clearly it is the activity of its own faculty and results in its own kind of truth'.

7. For those who held this view of things there existed a moral faculty, a religious faculty, a faculty of perception (which they usually did not regard as a kind of thinking at all), and philosophy itself had its own special source of wisdom and its own particular kind of truth. Psychology, for them, was the study of the number and character of our 'faculties'. It is easy enough to see how these ideas came to fix themselves in men's minds. In the physical world, objects are discriminated by occupying different places in space, why should not this be true also of the mind?

And all we need say is, 'Why *should* it be true of the mind?' One German philosopher, discovering different kinds of thinking, invented names—Understanding, Practical Reason, Theoretic Reason. Really thought they existed.

Now, this theory of thinking has two main characteristics. (a) It is the line of least resistance; it is the crudest possible and the most complicated explanation of the facts. And (b), it fails to endow the world of thinking with any kind of unity. All these kinds of thinking are separate and all result in their own kind of truth—perceptual truth, moral truth, religious truth, philosophical truth and the rest—and there it ends.

(a) The first of these characteristics offends against the so-called law of Parsimony, which declares that the more complex theory must yield to the less complex. The scientific objection to the theory that human beings are a special creation, wholly different from start to finish, from any other species of being, is an objection of this sort. It makes the world unnecessarily complicated; it explains nothing, it merely draws a line. Compare Paracelsus' Physiology.

(b) And the second, that it does not give to the world of thinking any kind of unity, is as much as to say that it is not an explanation at all. For what we mean by an explanation of a number of phenomena is some showing of how they are related, some attempt to give them unity. This theory, then, is merely an apology for the lack of one. And what is more, we have only to ask, 'Where are these faculties? What is your evidence for their existence?' and the only possible answer is, 'Oh, they do not exist in that kind of way. These faculties are like the atoms and molecules of the physicist. They are not objects of observation, you cannot see them, even with a microscope, they are the postulates of a theory to explain the behavior of other objects which we do and can observe.' And our reply is, again, 'well, it is a bad explanation; find another.' For what, after all, is any of these faculties but an hypostatised abstraction? To ascribe a human thought or action to a faculty in man is like ascribing the motion of a billiard-ball to a faculty in the billiard-ball.

8. But, it does not follow, because we must abandon this idea of kinds of thinking being differentiated by being the activities of separate faculties, that the whole idea of there being different kinds of thought is an illusion. To refuse to be led away into a faculty-logic, to assert that every activity of thinking is the activity of the *whole mind*, and not of some one faculty,—it does not follow from this, that all thinking is undifferentiated, that all thinking is of the same kind and results in the discovery of the same truth. There are no special sources of wisdom; all thinking is the activity of the whole mind. Thinking is undifferentiated at its source.

9. How then shall we distinguish kinds of thought? May not the mind direct itself towards different objects at different times? If kinds of thought are not to be differentiated at their source, perhaps they can be distinguished in their *object*. Let us see what we can make of this.

The judgment, 'This is …', is obviously of a different kind from the judgment, 'This ought to be …'. Somehow, they are the results

of different kinds of thinking. The first explanation would say that one is the result of perception and leads to perceptual truth, and the other is the result of the moral faculty and leads to moral truth. But this, we have seen, is inadmissible. Our second explanation would say that both judgments are the result of the activity of a whole mind, but they are directed towards different objects, the one towards determining the existence of a thing and the other towards determining the moral necessity for the existence of a thing. Thinking is differentiated in its object and not in its source. Philosophical thinking is the mind directed towards a particular object. Political philosophy, a philosophical theory about politics, is not just any kind of thinking about politics, but thinking about a particular object in politics or a particular aspect of politics. These are questionable ways of saying what I mean, but I think they convey my meaning as clearly as I can just now.

Now, I said earlier on that the characteristic of an explanation, of a theory, is that it gives some kind of unity to the things it tries to explain or theorize. What kind of unity have we given to this differentiated world of thinking? We have seen that it is the whole mind, and not some abstract faculty, which thinks on all occasions—and so far we have achieved a kind of unity. But we have seen, also, that the objects of thinking are many and we have not yet discovered whether or how they are related, that is, we have not yet explained them. So far then, our theory is only half a theory; the unity is all on one side. And what we must now do is to give a little more and closer attention to the other side, to these 'objects of thinking'.

Or, to put it another way, our theory has abolished the diversity of faculties, but it has left the diversity of *truths*, left them unrelated and unexplained. Our present position is precarious. All our thinking is the activity of our whole mind, but all our different kinds of thinking do not lead us to the same 'truth'. How are we to explain it? It is not enough to show that there are different kinds of thinking arising from a single mind, we must discover also the relations of these kinds of thinking, for there can be no differences

without likeness. Definition, the old logic taught us, is *per genus et differentiam*; to see a thing definitely, *we* may say, to see a thing clearly, we must see it as different from other things and yet as like other things.

10. I am loath to introduce words which appear to have a technical significance; the more we can free ourselves from the tyranny of words and a specialized vocabulary the clearer will be our thinking, but I think I can make my meaning clearest if I attach what I have to say about this differentiation of kinds of thinking to two particular words, and in telling you what I mean by them I shall try and tell you how I think we can most profitably conceive the relation of these different kinds of thinking. For unless we can see clearly what we mean by a 'kind of thinking', we shall not have discovered what we mean by the particular kind of thinking in which we are specially interested—philosophical thinking about politics. The words I have chosen are '*abstract*' and '*concrete*'.

11. By the word 'abstract' we commonly mean anything which we cannot touch or see, anything which does not enter into an ordinary world of sense. The abstract, with us, usually means the non-material. Very often we attach the word to ideas, and speak of 'abstract ideas'. All ideas are abstract, in ordinary language. If someone speaks of 'morality' we regard him as speaking 'abstractly', or using 'abstract ideas'. If we speak vaguely of 'flowers' or 'fire', we, again, speak 'abstractly'; for it is only '*these* flowers', or '*this* fire' which enter our world of sense and so is rescued from abstraction. Or again, we speak of certain people being interested in 'abstract thought'; mathematicians and philosophers are both usually spoken of in this way. And when we say a book is 'very abstract' we mean that its arguments do not seem to touch our life as we ordinarily live it.

On the other hand, the word 'concrete' means anything which we can touch and see, anything which does enter our ordinary world of sense. The material is the concrete: in fact, concrete is concrete. For most of us the phrase 'concrete ideas' would have very little

meaning: ideas are not concrete, they are not material. And we can only make an argument or a book concrete by making it apply to ordinary life, by illustrating it with, as we say, 'concrete examples'. When a speaker says, 'Let me take a concrete example', we know at once the kind of thing that is coming. And when we say, '*These* flowers are beautiful', we are attaching an abstract adjective to a concrete object.[1]

12. Now, like most of the notions we are accustomed to live and work with, there exists a certain amount of confusion in these ideas of abstract and concrete. And the particular confusion which I want to point out here is that these ideas say two things at once, that is, they are not clear ideas. And, until we have got our ideas as clear as we can get them we are not likely to know what they are or to be able to express ourselves very adequately by them.

These ordinary ideas of concrete and abstract tell us two things and tell us them at the same time. They tell us (i) What abstractness and concreteness is, and (ii) what things are abstract and concrete. They tell us not only the characteristics of the qualities we are looking for, but also in what particular things these qualities are to be found. If a man were to set out to tell me what morality is I might listen to him patiently, I might even agree with him; but if, without any further proof or agreement, he were to go on to say, 'You are not moral', I should know what to think of his logic.

For obviously, after we have decided what morality is, it requires a separate demonstration to show that this or that man possesses or lacks the qualities we have called moral. And it requires a demonstration of a different sort. It is one thing for me to say, 'A man who can swim two miles I call a good swimmer', and quite another thing for me to say, 'You are a good swimmer.' The first is a matter of opinion; but the second is to be demonstrated only

[1] Cp. 'Objective'. Usually = solid; but it is really only what we are obliged to think—see B. Bosanquet, *The Essentials of Logic Being Ten Lectures on Judgement and Inference* (London and New York: Macmillan and Co., 1895), p. 11: 'the objective is … whatever we are obliged to think'.

by measuring how far you can swim. And 'abstract' and 'concrete' are in the same case. The common notion of 'abstractness' implies incompleteness, inadequacy.

An abstract thing is something partial, something which taken by itself lacks significance. We show this by speaking of 'the *merely* abstract'. It implies unreality. But the common notion goes on from this to say that ideas are abstract, partial, unreal; that anything which is not material, tangible, or visible is abstract and so incomplete, lacking in significance. And this second step it takes without argument or proof. In the same way, 'concreteness' means wholeness, completeness, something adequate and significant, something real. And the common notion goes on to say that the material, the visible, the tangible are concrete, and so real, complete, significant. And it, also, takes this second step without argument or proof.

13. Now, our best course is, I think, to accept what the common notion tells us of the meaning of 'abstractness' and 'concreteness' and go on from there to ask ourselves what things, or what kind of things, are abstract and concrete. That is, where the common notion is quiescent we must be alert, where it is confused, we must be clear.

Abstract, then, means incomplete, partial, insignificant, unreal. Concrete means, complete, whole, significant, real. And we must ask, *what* things are abstract, and *what* things are concrete.

14. Let me give you three examples of things that are abstract, and you will, I think, see that our ordinary notion of abstraction is not only inadequate in that it failed to discuss what things are abstract, but actually wrong in the kind of thing it assumed to be abstract.

(a) It was one of the doctrines of the Sophists that the character of what they called 'the natural man' was made up simply of sensations, such as pleasure and pain. Everything else was thought to be something which this 'natural man' acquired from society at one time or another. But Socrates, in arguing with them, showed that if this really were the case, 'natural man' would have no character

at all, he would not be a man, much less natural. For sensations, in themselves, are isolated, individual, singular. We cannot *feel* the same pain twice for that would imply memory and a coordinated experience, it would imply thought. These sensations, then, about which the Sophists had been talking, are abstractions, they do not exist per se; they are a part of our way of experiencing things which if you isolate it you at once make nonsense of the whole thing. A *mere* feeling, absolutely alone and isolated, is something which we know nothing about, it is a *mere* abstraction. You will remember that we discovered the hypothetical 'faculties' of the mind to be *abstractions*, of the same kind. They are things which, if we are silly enough we can *suppose*, but which do not really exist at all.

(b) Or again, some people are fond, in political philosophy, of speaking about 'the individual', and they talk of him as something which is readily isolable, as something concrete, a whole in himself and requiring nothing outside him to give him such significance as he possesses. But, where is such an individual? Is 'the individual', taken strictly by himself, still there, still a human being, still the *same* human being? Of course, the truth is that this 'individual' is an abstraction of the worst kind, he has never existed and could never exist. And we can only imagine him by the greatest effort of abstract thought.

(c) Or, here is a simpler example. We say that a tennis ball is round, but this 'roundness' is not something which exists separately and all by itself. You cannot take it away from the tennis ball; just sheer isolated roundness is nothing at all. We can imagine it, perhaps, with difficulty, but it is an abstraction, an abstract conception which we can gain by analysing the qualities which go to make up a tennis ball. And so with a number of other things—weight, colour, size—these are all abstractions if we take them simply by themselves.

15. Our aim in starting this discussion of the meaning of 'abstract' and 'concrete', you will remember, was in order to be able to distinguish between kinds of thinking. Kinds of thinking are distinguishable in their object and not in their source, that was our

conclusion. And the difficulty was to give some unity to the various objects which we saw thought proposes to itself at different times. Well, our principle of unity is, I think, this one of abstract and concrete.

16. In abstract thinking what we do is, not to use only one *faculty* or part of the mind, as some people have thought, but to use the *whole mind* for the purpose of considering separately things which are not really separable, for making distinctions where none really exist, for obtaining the part out of the whole by the omission of other parts. For example, when we consider the size or weight of a thing separately and without any reference to the whole thing before us, we are performing an act of abstract thinking. How deeply this power of abstract thinking has entered into our ordinary lives is not always realized, and I shall have something more to say about it in a later lecture, but it is not too much to say that the common world, in which we rise and eat and go to bed, is for the most part an abstract world.

Life in a consciously concrete world, as we shall see later on, would hardly be tolerable. Very few days pass in our lives when we are not called upon to use the simple arithmetical process of counting, and this is a complicated feat of abstract thought, which we have performed so often that we rarely stop to recognize it as such. For, to count apples is to notice only one aspect of their existence, their 'one, two, three-ness', so to speak. And when we go a little further and say, 'two and two make four', we have become utterly indifferent to the nature or existence of any particular things, and are expressing an abstract idea which is applicable to any mortal thing we like to choose.

Another example of abstract thinking is what is called analysis. What analysis does is to make distinctions within a given whole. This, for many purposes is a justifiable procedure, but it is always a dangerous one. For, if we go further, and say that these distinctions we have made are real and display the nature of the thing, we are likely to make ourselves ridiculous. 'It is a very common and most ruinous superstition to suppose that analysis is no alteration, and

that, whenever we distinguish, we have at once to do with divisible existence', says Bradley. 'It is an immense assumption to conclude, when a fact comes to us as a whole, that some parts of it may exist without any sort of regard to the rest.'[2] This, of course, was what the Sophists did with the thing they called 'sensation', and it is what anyone does who comes to the concrete experience of society and abstracts from it individuals which never have, and never could, exist by themselves.

So much, for the moment, for abstract thinking; but before we leave it you should notice that thinking can have different degrees of abstractness. We ought not to say that this or that is just 'abstract thinking', we ought to go and see how abstract, how partial, and how incomplete it is. And you will see that this is a much harder matter than simply identifying it as abstract in some degree or other.

17. Of concrete thought it is very much harder to speak. In general, we know that, if it is to be really concrete, it must deal only with whole things, with things that really do exist apart and independently of one another, but further than this it is hard to go. And, naturally, just as there can be degrees of abstractness in thought, there are, also, degrees of concreteness. Socrates' view of human experience was more concrete—or less abstract, which you like—than that of the Sophists. Or again, we can see the effort after wholeness, concreteness when Socrates asks, 'Do you conceive it possible to comprehend *satisfactorily* the nature of the soul without comprehending the nature of the universe?'[3] We might even translate it, 'Do you conceive it possible to comprehend *concretely* the nature of the soul without comprehending the nature of the universe?' What he was after, you see, was something that he could

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[2] [F.H. Bradley, *Principles of Logic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1883), §64, reprinted in *Writings on Logic and Metaphysics*, ed. James W. Allard and Guy Stock, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 77–8.]

[3] Plato, *Phaedrus*, 270 [tr. J. Wright, op. cit., p. 77. Cp. p. 136, above.]

really call a *whole*; and that is just what we mean by the word 'universe'.

18. If, then, we give some sort of unity to the diverse world of thinking by looking at it in the light of this 'abstract–concrete' principle, we are still left with some of our difficulties. If we say that different kinds of thinking are to be distinguished by the abstractness or concreteness of their objects, what are we to say about this word 'truth'? Apparently our conclusion is that the result of abstract thinking is abstract truth, and of concrete thinking, concrete truth. But what is abstract truth? If we retain the meaning of 'abstract' which we have hitherto used, abstract truth will be conditional, partial, incomplete truth. And, if so, must we not ask, 'Then, how *truth* at all?'

Truth, if it means anything, must mean the whole; the true thing is the whole thing. And have we not discovered that the whole thing is the concrete thing? Truth and concreteness, and reality for that matter, must mean all the same thing. What is true is real, and only what is true is a whole. And it is only by importing these ideas into the different worlds of abstract thought that we can give any meaning at all to the expression 'abstract truth'. The world of mathematics, for example, is an abstract world; and in so far as mathematicians exploring its nature and possibilities give to it a certain unity, and therefore a certain wholeness and completeness, do they achieve something which we may call 'mathematical truth'. But since such 'truth' is, and always must remain, abstract, it can be called truth only by analogy, by importing into an abstract world a unique characteristic of the concrete world.

19. We started by saying that philosophical thinking was thinking directed towards the discovery of truth, and we set out to discover what we meant by 'truth', and 'thinking'. And it is no mere rearrangement and translation of *words* if we say now that philosophical thinking is concrete thinking. Because we know, now, something of what we mean by 'thinking' and something of what we mean by 'concrete'. Wherever there is concrete thinking, there is

philosophy; wherever there is concrete thinking about politics, there is a philosophy of politics. It is a common notion that philosophy deals only with abstractions, and that sense-perception and natural instinct lie in the region of the concrete, but this we have seen to be what it is—a prejudice. Philosophy is that which is most antagonistic to abstraction, that is the principle of its differentiation from other kinds of thinking.

20. In this world of thinking which we have been examining there can be an unlimited number of kinds of thinking which are in some degree abstract, but, clearly, there can be only one kind of thinking which is concrete, that is, directed towards the whole. For there is no limit to the aspects of things, no limit to the partial ways of looking at things, but there can only be one kind of concrete thinking, one kind of concrete truth.

If we could put down all the kinds of thinking that exist, all the abstract worlds which the minds of men have explored or are exploring, and arrange them in some kind of hierarchy according to their degree of concreteness, then and not till then, should we have brought system, unity, meaning into the whole world of thinking. Some men have believed that they have really achieved this. And it could be achieved in two ways.

(i) By arranging the different kinds of thinking in a hierarchy according to their history; according to the empirical order in which they seem to emerge in the life of the individual or of the race. Each kind of abstract thought is a stage through which we have passed in our effort to find this single concrete kind of thinking for which we are looking. Now there are obvious difficulties in the way of achieving a system of this sort, and clearly it would be much easier to discover in our own lives this succession of stages of thought, than in the life of the human race as a whole. It is all very well to say that at one stage in your life historical thinking seemed to you to give the truth you were looking for, and at another, scientific thinking,—this may be true enough for you. But it is going much further to say, as some have said, that the typical kind of thinking

of the nineteenth century was historical, and to call that century the Historical Age.

(ii) The other way in which this system of kinds of thinking might be achieved would be to examine simply the logical value, the value for the attainment of truth, of each kind of thinking which came before you, and see if you could put them into an order of *value* and not an order of mere empirical emergence in the history of the individual or of the race.

Hegel thought he had achieved both these classifications of kinds of thinking, and a few people since have tried to do the same thing. But, on the whole, I think we can hardly share their opinion of their success. However, *I* do not propose to attempt any such thing, and I think there are some conclusions we may come to without coming to a conclusion so complete as this would be.

21. You will, no doubt, be wondering exactly what is the bearing of all this upon the philosophical approach to politics. It is this, and I think it is important. Philosophical thinking is concrete thinking, and we have seen what we mean by that. Philosophical thinking about politics is concrete thinking about politics, and I hope, before we have finished, that we shall see something of what we mean by that. But this, at any rate, is clear: if we can find any thinking about politics which is abstract, then that thinking is not philosophical, whatever else it is. And if it is not philosophical, remember, it has no bearing whatever on philosophy, it cannot properly contribute to or criticize any way of thinking which deals with the concrete.

Here, then, is one task: to rehearse together the kinds of thinking about politics and find which among them are abstract and which is concrete. That we shall find many that are abstract we can have little doubt; that we shall find any that is concrete is not so certain. But, if there has been no concrete thinking about politics, if the history of thinking about politics has no instance of concrete, that is philosophical, thinking, then there still remains to us the possibility of seeing clearly what are the particular characteristics of concrete thinking about politics over and above the general characteristics of all thinking that is properly called concrete.

Political Thinking in General

1. So far, as perhaps you are aware, I have said a great deal about something we have called 'philosophy', and next to nothing about 'politics', but this morning I intend as best I can to make good this deficiency.

2. We have seen, in an abstract kind of way, what are some of the requirements of a philosophy, what we mean when we speak of a philosophical theory. Philosophical thinking we have called concrete thinking, it is an effort to see the wholeness of things, an effort not to be led away into this or that abstract view. Philosophy is not just thinking in general—at least in the sense in which we ordinarily use the word thinking—it is a particular kind of thinking. A philosophy of something, a philosophical theory, means, then, a particular method and a particular approach. And 'politics', which is what I want to talk about this morning, means a particular subject-matter. Or, at least, we may, just now, take it as meaning that, though I think we shall soon have to revise the idea. Because the question will come up before we have finished, 'Just in what sense philosophy can be said to have a particular subject matter?' 'How can concrete thinking recognize particulars?'

3. I have already spoken about some of the difficulties in the way of thinking concretely, of philosophical thinking, and we shall see these more clearly as we go on. But our difficulties do not end there, for the particular nature of our subject-matter—'politics'—causes at least as many more difficulties, and from it arise many of the most insistent misunderstandings which hinder its study. Our first difficulty with many of the books on the subject is that we have a feeling that their writers do not know quite *how* they are writing about it, they do not know whether their thought is abstract or whether it aims at being concrete; and before long we sometimes add to this a suspicion that they do not know either *what* they are thinking and talking about. Nor should it surprise us that these two difficulties go together, because they are not really two, but a single

deficiency,—the *how* is the *what*. Let me explain this more fully, for it is a difficult, and I think, an important point.

4. The *how* is the *what*: *how* we think about a thing governs *what* we think about.[1] At first this may appear a little nonsensical, but that, I think, is because we are accustomed to think abstractly and in an abstract world the concrete *is* apt to appear nonsensical. 'If anything', you will say, 'it is the other way round; *what* a thing is, governs *how* I am to think about it'. But how are you to know *what* it is until you have thought about it? You see, an ordinary assumption is that we first have a thing (somehow) and then start to think about it; but it is a ridiculous assumption. The only way in which we can 'have' a thing, in any sense, is by thinking about it. For you and I, at any rate, a thing's nature, *what* it is, is only revealed by thinking about it; and as we have seen there can be many ways of thinking about it,—many abstract and one concrete. If you think abstractly about something—the 'thing', so to say—the result of your thinking—is an abstract thing; if you think concretely, the 'thing' which results from you thinking is a concrete thing.

But this is only a way of speaking, as you can see clearly enough, for it is only in some very ambiguous sense that there is a 'thing' there at all before we start thinking. The raw materials of the 'thing' may be there, but the real thing certainly isn't as far as you or I are concerned. But I don't want to get on to that, rather difficult, subject. All I want to make clear is that the nature of our thinking governs the result of our thought; if it is abstract thinking, the result will be an abstract 'thing'. Concrete thinking produces a concrete thing. *How* we think about a thing governs *what* we are thinking about. But an illustration may make this clearer.

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[1] Cp. A. Huxley, *Those Barren Leaves* (Paris: Librairie Gaulon & Fils; Leipzig: Bernard Tauchniz, 1933 [1925]). [Oakeshott's note 'ad fin' suggests he may have been referring to a speech given by Huxley to the character of Calamy near the end of the novel, at p. 347: 'The reality remains the same; but the axes vary with the mental position, so to speak, and the varying capacities of different observers.']

You remember I likened some of the confusion that exists today among writers on political philosophy to that which would be caused were a chess player, playing chess, to regard himself as having defeated a billiard player playing billiards, or vice versa. And all the elements of our situation are in the picture. What we called 'thinking' in general corresponds to 'playing' in general. When we say thinking is of a certain sort, we mean that it is directed towards a certain end, it may be an abstract end—and if so there is a large choice of ends of this sort—or it may be a concrete end. And when we make 'playing' less general, we speak of 'playing chess' or 'playing billiards'.

Now clearly, if to the question, '*What* are you playing?' we answer, 'Chess', we must give the same answer to the question, '*How* are you playing?', because 'how' there means, 'what kind of playing is it that you are playing?' So with thinking, *what* we think, the result, the 'thing', is governed by *how* we are thinking. Now the instance of kinds of 'playing' is clearer than the instance of kinds of thinking, simply because in the one the difference of the result—chess and billiards—is so much more obvious than the difference of the result in the other, but, believe me, though it may be more obvious, it is not more real. And this may help to explain why we have a suspicion that some writers on 'politics' know neither *what* they are writing about nor *how* they are writing about it.

5. Like everything else, then, 'politics' is a different 'thing' for each of the different ways we may think about it. But that even is not our initial difficulty with the subject; our first difficulty meets us when we attempt to decide the meanings of words, long before we face the meanings of things. When we use the word 'politics', what do we wish to be understood by it?

(i) I suppose its most general, its widest, meaning is implied in our phrase 'practical politics', when we say something 'is not practical politics'. We mean by that, simply that it is not practical, that it does not fit in with, harmonize with 'practical life'. The word 'politics' here means life in its most ordinary and general sense.

(ii) When we say of a man that he is 'going in for politics', we mean that he intends to stand for Parliament, or that in some way or other he is going to connect himself with the 'government' of the country. 'Politics', here, means 'government'. And it is by a further specialization of this already specialized meaning, that we speak of 'party politics'.

(iii) Or again, there is another meaning of the word, not so common perhaps, but none the less legitimate if it proves useful, which is at once wide and specialized: it is roughly what we understand the Greeks to have meant by the corresponding word in their language. 'Politics' as the study of 'political life'; 'political life' being—all that we mean by 'life', life in a society, with all its variety and conflict, 'its amazing welter of wills which press on one another', its momentary harmonies and occasional orderliness, its possessing and giving and taking, its command and obedience, its law and government, its justice and mercy, and all that lies behind them. For

> Justinian's Pandects only make precise
> What simply sparkled in men's eyes before,
> Twitched in their brow or quivered on their lip,
> Waited the speech they called but would not come.[2]

This social life which is, at least, the environment in which what we call the self grows and matures, which includes all that we mean by culture and religion; a sensibility for society is the sense of membership of a whole indistinguishable from one's self, and in this whole alone love and friendship are real; this is what the Greeks meant by a 'political' life, a life in a 'city'—at its highest they characterized it as the 'good life', and at its lowest it still had the possibility of the 'good life' in it.

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[2] R. Browning, 'The Ring and the Book', Bk 5, ll. 1781–4, in *Poetical Works*, viii. 89. [F.W. Maitland quoted the passage from Browning in his *Township and Borough* (London: Routledge/ Thoemmes Press, 1997 [1898]), p. 20: see S. Reynolds, *Kingdoms and Communities in Western Europe, 900–1300*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 66.]

Now, there seem to me very many reasons why this last meaning of the word 'politics' is the most suitable for us. The best of them is, I think, that were we to start with any of the narrower meanings—that which implies simply 'government', for example—we should soon find ourselves driven to this wide but not unduly vague meaning before we could satisfy ourselves. But, be that as it may, it is this meaning which I intend to use here. By 'political life' I mean organized social life and all that goes with it.

6. But, even when we have come to this decision about words, we are still faced with one other difficulty—that this so-called 'thing', this 'political life', will be a different 'thing' for each of the different ways in which we may choose to think about it. And our hardest task is to prevent this circumstance from creating confusion, to prevent ourselves from making the mistake of our unfortunate chess and billiard players, from being like wrestlers who wrestle and yet never come to grips.

Now, the usual and easiest way of making clear that we are speaking of two different things is to give them two different names. In 'playing' we speak of chess and billiards and we know that they are different; but in 'thinking' we do not, and to a certain extent cannot, follow this course. For example, we use the words 'real', 'life', 'will', 'law' in a great many different senses, and we do not always realize that *how* we are thinking of them in each particular case governs *what* they are.

Our case would be comparatively simple if for each different way of thinking of a thing we had to learn a new language; but we are not even so fortunate as that; what we have to do is to learn a new meaning for an old and already overburdened word. The position seems to be just about as difficult as it can be; but then, thinking *is* difficult. And, in anything to do with 'politics', not only are the words we use ambiguous but, just where we require the utmost coolness and detachment, we are forced to use words commonly connected with warm feeling, with high praise or with severe reproach, which excite passions and disturb thought.

'Freedom', 'right', 'justice', 'morality',—these are not words which remain the same, but which, according to our various abstract objects of thinking, mean a hundred different things; each of them different also from that one concrete meaning which philosophy wishes always to imply. They are words which provoke the fever of battle as readily as the detachment of thought; and often a single situation will provoke both these reactions in different individuals and the result is inevitable misunderstanding and a fruitless controversy of cross-purposes, such, for instance, as has been carried on during the last ten years between most of the so-called 'pluralists' and the so-called 'absolutists' in political philosophy.

7. Perhaps I can make a little clearer this primary difficulty which confronts us directly we start to think about political life, if I put what I have been saying in another way and give you another illustration. I will choose the word 'society'.

The word 'society' has been used with a very great variety of meanings, and again, each meaning is a different 'thing'; for things are meanings, and meanings are the only things we know everything about. Among some people the word is written, or spoken, with a capital letter, and to them it means simply those people whom it is nice to know, who live in a certain part of London, and have half a column in the *Morning Post* when they marry.

This, perhaps, is a rather specialized meaning. At other times 'society' is used as meaning the opposite to solitude, as meaning simply companionship, human companionship. But the contrast between society and solitude is one which will hardly bear examination. What men have desired when they have sought solitude is not some vague and empty aloneness, but society, society of a different sort—and most of them have said as much.

> There is society where none intrudes,
> By the deep sea[3]

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[3] [G. Byron, 'Childe Harold's Pilgrimage', Canto IV v. CLXXVIII, in *Poetical Works*, ed. F. Page (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 250.]

says Byron. The society and the solitude which we are apt to contrast are the sheerest abstractions.

Then there is a meaning of 'society' which is considered equally applicable to men as to animals: Society meaning just 'gregariousness'. This is not an illegitimate use of the word, anymore than the former two uses are illegitimate, but it is an abstract use, that is, it is the creation of a kind of thinking which is abstract. And we may call that kind of thinking 'sociology', 'physiology', or 'psychology', or by any other name we choose. Aristotle is reported to have said something which has been translated, 'man is a social animal' and Francis Galton, in his fascinating volume called *Inquiries into Human Faculty*, says that 'the ox of the wild parts of western South Africa' is a 'social animal', but it is clear that Aristotle and Galton did not mean the same thing by the epithet 'social'.[4] Aristotle would hardly claim all the qualities for the 'Ox of the western part of South Africa' which he claims for man.

Others, again, have meant by a society any fellowship, or joining together of men for any purpose whatever. Thus, there is the Society of Jesus or the community of Jesuits, and there is the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. This usage is extended by the French and Germans to organizations and communities whose purpose is commercial, and they speak of *Société anonyme* and *Aktiengesellschaft*, but in England we commonly use the word 'company' for this kind of 'society'.

And then, lastly, there is the use of the word 'society' which implies a definitely moral quality. A society is a community the essence of whose communism is moral, the purpose of whose fellowship is a moral life. When Plato said that in so far as a community of robbers was really a community it rested upon 'justice'—a moral quality—he meant that if we look at society as a whole, if we think about it a little more concretely than we are accustomed to think, and a little less abstractly, we discover that it is a moral quality which makes it what it is. And were we to say that the bond which joins

[4] [F. Galton, *Inquiries into Human Faculty and its Development* (London: J.M. Dent & Co., 1883).]

men together into anything that can properly be called a society is a moral bond, we should merely be translating what Plato said about justice into language which is a little more English and a little less Greek.

8. Now, I have explained this divergence of meaning attaching to a single word, by saying that each meaning is the result of a particular way of thinking. And if each way or kind of thinking were to keep within its own limits and not allow its conclusions to stray beyond its own particular world, there could be no contradiction implied in this variety, but neither could one meaning be held to supplement or add to another. Where there can be no contradiction there can be no criticism and no agreement, that, in the world of thinking, seems to be to be a fundamental principle.

But all this can be said in another way. Variety of meaning attached to a single word introduces what we ordinarily call 'technical language'. 'Technical language' implies, so to speak, a technical world in which that language has meaning and significance: 'technical language' implies 'technical thinking'. But by 'technical language' we mean language for a certain limited purpose:[5] the mark, that is, of 'technical thinking' is partiality, incompleteness, of limited significance, and this is just what I have called 'abstract thinking'. Technical language consists of words applied to abstract objects.

9. If, then, we could get at a concrete view, if we could achieve concrete thinking, that is, philosophy, then, since our thinking would not be abstract, our language would not be technical. Concrete thinking alone makes use of language which is not technical: philosophy has no jargon.

Now, this statement goes so much against the accepted view of what philosophy is and seems so flagrantly untrue, that I confess I have small hopes of persuading you of its truth. And, indeed, I shall not attempt to do so. Let me explain a little more fully what I mean,

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[5] e.g. 'literature' in the scientists' language.

and if then you do not understand, I will not attempt to persuade you further, the thing must prove itself or nobody can prove it.

10. First, then, when I say that the language of philosophy is the only nontechnical language that exists I mean it as a kind of definition, or at any rate as a means of identification. Show me a 'philosophy' whose language proves itself to be technical, that is, abstract, and I should answer that this and no more proves it to be the product of abstract thinking, and so not a philosophy. Now, there is no doubt that some of the thinking which has been taken to be philosophical has made use of a technical jargon, but unless we are to make the absurd statement that all that has ever been called 'philosophy' is philosophy, we are in no way bound to accept that which is called by a name as the genuine thing unless it proves itself to be such. Philosophical thinking must show itself to be philosophical not by being included in this or that history of philosophy, but by demonstrating its own concreteness, by repelling all efforts to show that it is abstract, partial, incomplete.

And, secondly, it may well be that the language of genuine philosophy appears technical if by technical we mean simply that which is not in the commonest and most ordinary use. But I have already said that technical means, for me, abstract. Abstractness means incompleteness and partiality, and I have yet to be shown that the ordinary and common is the complete, and that the philosophical is the partial and abstract. And of this I will give you two illustrations.

First, the word 'real'.

(i) In ordinary language we have a hundred different meanings for the word, but most of them boil down into something of the same meaning as is commonly given to 'concrete'; that is, the 'real' means the visible, the tangible, the material. This, as we saw when we were discussing the concrete, begs the question by saying two things at once and saying neither coherently. The real as the material is an abstract conception, and its language is technical.

(ii) Again, when a lawyer speaks of 'real property', his meaning is definite, but his language is abstract; it is, as we say, 'a technical use' of the word 'real'.

(iii) And what does the 'real' mean for philosophy?[6] The 'real' in philosophy always means simply that which alone exists. Not, 'that which is material' or 'that which is spiritual', but only, in the first place, that which exists. Some philosophers have gone on to say that that which exists is material, or spiritual, but 'the real' always means simply what it says—'that which exists'. And this seems to me to be, at any rate, less abstract, less technical than the language of the market place or of the law courts.

And, secondly, the word 'state'. This word, also, has a variety of meanings, some of which, at any rate, must be abstract simply because, as we have seen, there can be only one concrete meaning. Of these abstract meanings I shall notice only three.

(i) The word 'state' as a term of abuse. With certain writers, if they wish utterly to condemn a man or an institution they somehow connect him or it with something they call the 'state'. Here are two instances. The modern state, says Sorel, is 'a body of intellectuals, which is invested with privileges and which possesses means of the kind called political for defending itself against the attacks made on it by other groups of intellectuals eager to possess the profits of public employment.'[7] 'The State,' says Bakunin, 'is not Society, it is an historical form of it, as brutal as it is abstract. It was born historically in all countries of the marriage of violence, rapine, pillage, in a word war and conquest.'[8]

(ii) The second use of the word 'state' I wish to call your attention to is that in which it is taken to mean nothing more nor less

[6] [MS del.: 'With different philosophies it has meant a number of different things; the material has been taken to be the real, or it has been thought that there is no reality outside mind or spirit. But when philosophy has said such things as these, it has meant always that this or that is that which alone exists and it cannot prove itself to be real by being material or spiritual, but only by being real proving itself to exist *per se*.']

[7] Sorel, *La décomposition du Marxisme*, p. 53. [cp. p. 89 n. 46, above.]

[8] Bakunin, 'Dieu et l'Etat', *Works*, i. 287. [cp. p. 89 n. 47, above.]

than the machinery of government, in the narrowest sense. 'The State is nothing so much as a great public-service corporation', says Professor Laski. Or again, the same writer says, 'The State is concerned only with these social relations that express themselves by means of government.' This also is abstract, this kind of 'State' is an abstraction, simply because the notion of a government existing by itself and for its own sake is, not only, as Schopenhauer says, the apotheosis of philistinism,[9] but is a sheer abstraction. 'Government' does not explain itself, it requires some larger whole in which it can be subsumed before we recognize its real significance. Only the concrete can explain itself; the abstract, because it is what it is, is insufficient, incomplete, cannot stand on its own legs—is, in fact, all that we have already seen it to be.

(iii) The third use of the word 'state' is abstract, but perhaps not equally abstract; it is that which is adopted or created by *law*. 'A state may be defined, *in legal language*,' says Zimmern, 'as a territory over which there is a government claiming unlimited authority.'[10] Or again, Anson, in *The Law and Custom of the Constitution*, says that in constitutional law 'The Sovereign body or State is the power by which rights are created and maintained, by which the acts or forbearances necessary to their maintenance are habitually enforced.'[11] This use of the word is abstract because it is technical and recognizes itself as such.

The phrases 'in legal language' and 'in constitutional law' show that the writers recognize the limits of their definition—and that which is limited is abstract. But the concrete is the unlimited, the whole, that which is complete. We shall find then, that in a true philosophy of politics, the word 'state' will not be used as a name for this or that *thing*, because every phenomenal 'thing', in that sense, is abstract; but is a name for some unifying principle in political

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[9] Schopenhauer, 'On Jurisprudence and Politics', in *Parerga*, ii. 242. [Oakeshott's reference is to *Werke*, vi. 258.]

[10] Zimmern, *Nationality & Government*, p. 56 [cp. p. 95 n. 77, above].

[11] Anson, *The Law and Custom of the Constitution*, i. 2 [cp. p. 95 n. 79, above].

life. 'The State', by philosophy, that is by concrete thinking, is taken as a suitable name for that which in political life is a whole, is a concrete thing. And nothing is implied, initially, in the use of this word except that somehow, of some character, a whole exists. That 'political life' either is a whole or can be joined to a whole without being altogether lost.

Turn back and see how far we are from Professor Laski. The State, for him, is the government, and by asserting this he has done just what we saw our ordinary unexamined thoughts doing when they dealt with what is abstract and what is concrete. He says two things at once, and so neither clearly. He says that there is a whole and that this whole is the government—and all in one breath. Now, that 'the whole is the government' is a proposition which requires proof over and above any proof we may give of the existence and general nature of the whole itself—but no proof is offered. And what is more, not only is his statement, therefore, questionable, but we have seen reason for it being untrue. Government is, in no intelligible sense, a self-explaining whole.

11. Now, if philosophy were what we have seen it to be at the beginning of its history—just curiosity about anything and everything—it would not matter much what it said or how it said it. The abstract language of everyday life, or of law, or of history would all be equally appropriate to it. But we have seen that philosophy cannot now be understood as this merely general curiosity, and consequently its language must be as carefully chosen as the language of the law or of any of the sciences. Those, however, choose their language so that it shall be abstract, for what they say is the product of abstract thinking.

Philosophy, then, must see that its language is suitable to its way of thinking, that is, it must be what we have called concrete. 'Formerly', says Hegel, 'men of business, statesmen, occupied themselves with Philosophy; now, however, with the intricate idealism of the philosophy of Kant, their wings droop helpless to the ground.'[12] The first explanation we might give of this fact is that

[12] egel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, iii. 505.

the thought and language of philosophy is technical and so naturally not to be understood by the ordinary man, but this explanation breaks down simply because philosophy aims at concrete thinking and in so far as it fails to achieve this, in so far as its language does become abstract and technical in the sense in which we have used these words, it fails to be philosophy.

12. Here I will try and meet a difficulty which may have occurred to you. 'Surely', you will say, 'it is all very well to speak about different kinds of thinking as abstract and concrete, and even to say that some kinds may be less abstract and more concrete than other kinds, but how are you to prove that *all* thinking is not abstract, how can you show the existence of concrete thinking at all?' You say that a history of philosophy cannot prove that philosophy has really ever existed, what can prove it? Well, I will give you three reasons for supposing that concrete thinking, that is philosophy, exists or can exist.

(i) If there are various abstract ways of thinking about things there must be a concrete way of thinking about them, because the very notion of abstraction would be meaningless if no such thing as the concrete existed. Abstraction means incompleteness, partiality; and there can be no part without a whole, no incompleteness without completeness somewhere.

(ii) So then, this kind of concrete thinking which strives after the real whole not only can exist, but must exist. It is the only real thinking; that is, thinking can hardly be said to be thinking unless it is concrete thinking. All abstract thinking is defective thinking and so can be called thinking only by courtesy. 'But,' you will say, 'there may be a kind of thinking which strives to be concrete, but is there one which achieves concreteness?' But this is irrelevant.

(iii) Most abstract thinking is self-confessedly abstract, it aims, often consciously, at abstraction, and if it did not aim at abstraction it would be vain and useless. At any rate, then, we can say that philosophy differs from other kinds of thinking by *aiming* at

concreteness. It aims at discovering the concrete whole of truth, and no other kind of thinking has this object.[13]

13. Our task is now to search among the ways in which men think about society, political life, and see if we can find any non-technical, concrete thinking. We shall find that a number of different kinds of thinking will, at first sight, present themselves as the one we are looking for; but we have decided already that there can be only *one* kind of concrete thinking, and so if two or more ways of thinking about society present themselves as concrete, we shall know that *certainly* all save one, and *possibly* all, are abstract. What is not concrete must be abstract, and what is abstract cannot be concrete.

14. In my next three lectures, then, I am going to examine the claims of the three most important ways of thinking about society to be concrete thinking. We must put them to the test. If they reveal themselves to be abstract, then they are not what we are looking for, and, though they serve their particular purpose, we shall pass them by and go on in our search for the one concrete way of thinking.

The three kinds of thinking I have chosen to examine are The Scientific, The Historical and The Practical. I have chosen them because for each one of them the characteristic of concreteness has been claimed, each of these has claimed to be the philosophical approach to politics or part of the philosophical approach to politics. And what we want to know is, Is this claim justified? All cannot be concrete unless they are really all the same kind of thinking, because, as we have seen, there can only be *one* concrete. So our first business is to discover what is the essence of each of these kinds of thinking, to see if they differ and how they differ, and to see if one or none is concrete.

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[13] Concrete thinking can exist, must exist, and the only difficulty is to answer the question, '*Where* does it exist?'

Scientific Thinking about Politics

1. We have come already to a certain number of conclusions.[1] Our subject, we have discovered, cannot accurately be described as just 'thinking about politics', or 'political thought', because we have found that there are many kinds of thinking about politics; and what we want to know is, Which kind of thinking about politics is philosophical thinking? We then set about the business of trying to discover how we were to distinguish between kinds of thinking, and came to the conclusion that the words 'abstract' and 'concrete' expressed a principle by which different kinds of thinking could be distinguished.

Wherever concrete thinking about politics is to be found, there, and nowhere else, is philosophical thinking about politics. And wherever any kind of thinking about politics reveals itself to be abstract, then that kind of thinking is not philosophical, does not contribute to philosophy, and must not be regarded as in any way a valid criticism of philosophical thinking. For what is not philosophical cannot criticize philosophy, and cannot, therefore, either contribute to or contradict the conclusions of philosophy.

2. But, since it usually requires more than a casual glance at a particular kind of thinking to decide whether it is really abstract or concrete, and since a great number of different kinds of thinking have, at one time or another, represented themselves as concrete thinking about politics, and we know that there can be only *one*

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[1] [At the head of the lecture Oakeshott listed three works by F.H. Giddings; *The Principles of Sociology; Inductive Sociology A Syllabus of Methods, Analyses and Classifications, and Provisionally Formulated Laws* (London and New York: Macmillan & Co., 1901); and *The Scientific Study of Human Society* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press; London: Humphrey Milford for Oxford University Press, 1924). He also listed but deleted Spencer, *Introduction to Sociology*, possibly a reference to H. Spencer, *The Study of Sociology*, 10th edn (London: C. Kegan Paul & Co., 1881 [1873]), and C.S. Loch, *A Great Ideal and its Champion Papers and Addresses* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1923).]

kind of thinking which is really concrete—what we have now to do is to examine the more important kinds of thinking about politics to see if we can come to a considered conclusion about their abstractness or concreteness.

3. The three kinds of thinking I have chosen for this purpose are those that I have called The Scientific, The Historical and The Practical. And I have chosen them because it is most frequently claimed that one of them is, or some combination of them is, what we are looking for,—that is, concrete thinking about Politics.

4. Now there are certain possible discoveries open to us.

(i) We may discover that all these are, in different ways, abstract. That is, that none of them is what we are looking for.

(ii) We may discover that one of them is concrete, in our sense of the word, and so, *is* what we are looking for.

(iii) We may discover that they are not as separate as they look and that really, for example, historical thinking and scientific thinking about politics is the same thing. In which case, again, we may discover that among these, or some combination of these, concrete thinking is to be found.

(iv) But if we discover that these three are really separate kinds of thinking, then it is impossible that more than one of them is what we are looking for,—is concrete.

So we have a double question to ask of each of these kinds of thinking about politics.

(i) Is it really a separate and individual kind of thinking? And

(ii) Is it abstract or concrete?

We might go on to ask a third question, If it is abstract what degree of abstraction does it possess, *how* abstract is it? But that seems to me to be so difficult a question to answer that for the present I would rather not attempt it. And, in any case, we shall have discovered enough for our immediate purpose when we have found out whether each is abstract or concrete.

5. To-day we have to deal with what we have called *Scientific thinking about Politics*. (And I ought to remind you in what sense

we agreed to use the word Politics: it means, for us, the whole thing we call social, human life, it means 'society' in its widest and most general sense.)

Now, this scientific thinking about Politics has received various names. It has been called Political Science, Sociology, Anthropology, Ethnology and several other names;—these, in one sense or other, have at different times been regarded as the 'Science of Society'. '*Political Science*' has often meant simply the science of 'politics' in its narrowest sense—the science of government. But, at other times, it has implied something wider than mere government.

Aristotle, we saw, regarded the problems of government as only some of the problems to be treated by a true science of politics, and the word is used in this University to mean something a little wider than mere government. *Sociology* was a word invented about the middle of the last century by Auguste Comte, and was intended by him to mean the science of society in exactly the same way as 'biology' means the science of life, and 'geology' the science of the earth. *Anthropology* came into fashion about the same time, and is a word which has been applied chiefly to the study of man in his primitive state, and to the study of societies, customs, laws, and religions of undeveloped and so-called 'savage' races. And *Ethnology* is hardly distinguishable from Anthropology.[2]

These words, then, do not all mean the Science of Society in exactly the same sense; and some of them have now come to be applied to studies which are not characteristically scientific at all.

6. But, whatever name suits our fancy, what we want to know is, What is the purpose and what is the method of this science, which has been called 'The science of analytical sociology',[3] but which I have called more simply, The Science of Society? One of its ablest and sanest exponents, bearing in mind the terminology of an older science, Economics, has said that Sociology is the 'science of social

[2] [MS del: 'a word popularized by the famous chapter in Mill's *Logic* called "Ethnology, or the Science of the Formation of Character" has come to mean the study of man and his behavior.']

[3] See MacIver, 'Preface' to *Community*.

well-being'.[4] Economics is the science of wealth in one sense of the word; Sociology is the science of wealth in another, and perhaps slightly wider, sense of the word.

Now the notion that lies behind this conception of a Science of Social Well-being is one which has been gathered from an observation of social or political life and its conditions. In different communities the conditions and standard of social well-being vary greatly—habits and customs considered indispensable in some, will seem purposeless in others. And so, also, in different classes of the same society. And the first task of him who would construct a science of social well-being, social 'wealth', is to observe the facts.

To do this he need not go far afield, he need not, like the anthropologists, penetrate into the dim regions of primitive life and savage custom, he need not, in most cases, go outside his own society. Sometimes, it would be definitely advantageous were he to confine his observations to some particular geographical area, or to a particular class of people, or to those employed in a particular trade or industry within his society. That is why it has been called by the rather barbarous name of the science of *analytical* sociology.

7. There are, of course, innumerable instances of studies of this sort, made on varying scales, some to include a whole nation, some with reference to a single town or village. But the essence of any study of this sort is simply the inclusion of human society, its conditions of well-being, growth and development, among the objects of natural science. The survey of a region with a view to determining the particular conditions of human life existing there,—its climate and agricultural fertility, its natural resources and the particular occupations of its inhabitants, the effect of the density of its population on the division of labour, the standard of health and culture, and all with a view to determining the real conditions of social well-being—a survey of this sort is not very different from the scientific survey of a particular region with a view to determining its characteristic flora and fauna, in fact it is different from it only in its *object*, and not at all in its *method*.

[4] Loch, *A Great Ideal*, p. 44.

8. But no scientist would pretend or admit that botany consists simply ina number of disconnected surveys of this kind, or that zoology is merely a matter of mapping out different species of animal and determining where on the earth's surface each is most commonly found. And so, this science of society, of social well-being, cannot properly call itself a science unless it reaches principles, reaches something more than a heterogeneous collection of facts. And this is what it is continually attempting. Science advances not by the mere accumulation of facts. Mere facts teach nothing. Science advances by the framing and testing of hypotheses,—guessing at causes. The only useful observations are those made under the guidance of some hypothesis.

This is very well illustrated in the work of one of the great sociologists of the last century, the Frenchman named Le Play. Here is a short description of one of his lines of observation.[5]

> Le Play, noticing the anomaly of increasing wealth and weakened manners, and the variety of conditions that prevailed in the life of families, investigated the actual circumstances of people in different countries, not from the side of their wage or remuneration only and their ability to earn wages and produce goods, but also from the point of view of their life as members of society and of the groups into which society divides itself. Thus, for him, the place with its geographical characteristics, the home, the family and its relationships, the earnings of its members, their means of social preservation, industry, thrift, property, habits, manners, education, religion, their relations to the village or town or state—all that was actual and formative in their lives was brought under one survey; and matters economic in fact or by inference came to be treated as but a part of the whole.

Or again, the demand for an eight hours, or a ten hours day is, in itself, arbitrary. This Science of Society must avoid that which is merely arbitrary, for that is the denial of science, and must go further and find the grounds on which such a demand can and

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[5] Loch, *A Great Ideal*, pp. 77–8.

should be made.[6] First physiological grounds, and then in relation to social habit and fact, and all in relation to a certain standard of social well-being, or as the Greeks would have said, 'good life' in so far as it is measurable.

Here, then, is, if not the laboratory method of biology and other natural sciences, at least the observatory method of astronomy. And the outcome of it all is some kind of general principles or laws. They may be psychological principles like that of 'imitation', which Tarde has imagined as governing all social life; or they may be economic and physical principles which explain the rise and fall of population, such as Malthus suggested. And you will see that the claim of this study to be a science in the full sense of the word, does not depend upon the proved and permanent truth of all the statements which have been made in its name.

Every science has made its mistakes, every science has its history of progressive discovery and continual re-formulation of laws and principles. If Malthus wasn't correct in what he said, others have studied the subject of population since: because Einstein has improved on Newton, it doesn't mean that physics isn't a science. Nor, again, does the apparent vagueness and formlessness of the subject-matter of this science of society make it less likely that it will be a science in the full sense. It has often been argued that human action is so unaccountable that the idea of making any 'science' out of it, is absurd. But then, both biology and psychology would come under this difficulty, and both these are admitted to be sciences. Indeed, no science is exempt from this apparent deficiency.

[6] [Oakeshott's marginal note refers to W.J Brown, *The Underlying Principles of Modern Legislation* (London: John Murray, 1912), p. 232, where the following passage occurs: '[T]he proposition I have stated would predispose me to adopt that form of socialism which most conserves the merits of the traditional system … the public ownership of industry does not necessarily imply an equality of material rewards for service; it does not necessarily imply public management … Nor does socialism necessarily imply the ownership of all industry by the State … it is possible to conceive of a socialistic State … in such a form as to suggest the term "competitive socialism".' Oakeshott also noted 'Bentham'.]

And the reason why the unaccountableness of human action makes no difference to the possibility of a science of social well-being is, that no science whatever ventures to predict the action of any '*individual*', be it a human being or atom or molecule. Science as we shall see more clearly in a moment deals only with *average* behaviour. It is muddleheaded thinking which says that sociology is a science but not an *exact* science, like physiology. Sciences are exact simply by leaving out those factors which might make them inexact, and sociology can do this, or does it, as well as any other.

9. Here, then, is a study which may fairly claim to be scientific thinking about Politics—in one sense of the word. That such a study is possible it would seem foolish to deny.[7] If anyone cares to study it further I should advise him to go to Durkheim's book on the method of Sociology. But, having found our scientific thinking about Politics, our next question will be, What is its significance? What kind of thinking is it? Is it *the* concrete thinking about Society for which we are looking, or is it *an* abstract kind of thinking about Society?

An answer to that question clearly requires us to discuss, and come to some conclusion about, the nature of all properly so-called 'scientific' thinking. If scientific thinking is concrete thinking, then scientific thinking about Politics will be concrete thinking about Politics, and if scientific thinking is abstract thinking, then scientific thinking about Politics will be abstract thinking about Politics. So our question may be put in this form;—What is the nature of Scientific thinking?

For our sociologists claim for themselves the use of 'the same method which has proved so successful in dealing with the physical universe'. And for many obvious reasons it is simpler and clearer to discuss the scientific method in relation to one of the so-called natural sciences than to confine our discussion entirely to this

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[7] [MS del.: 'and, moreover, it does not labour under any of the difficulties which suggested themselves with regard to what we called the Science of Societies, or Anthropology.']

Science of Society. But whatever we say of science in general will be true also of the Science of Society.

10. Let me take a simple example and try and gather what is to be said in general about scientific thinking round it. Imagine an elephant sliding down Madingley Hill on Tuesday afternoon. Imagine it to be a fact which we observe, and like any other observable fact science can tell us *something* about it. How does the scientist treat such a fact as this? In the first place he tries to put aside any emotional reaction he may have in the face of this fact—emotions of amusement or, perhaps, fear, which he might feel. These, he says, are irrelevant to the scientific outlook.

In the second place, he tries to observe this fact entirely dispassionately as if *he* were not there at all. He might describe his attitude by saying that it was the 'objective' occurrence which interested him and nothing else whatever. That is to say, the scientific observer leaves himself out of account altogether; what he wants to get at is a result which in no way depends upon the fact that *he* has observed it.

Thirdly, if we imagine him to be a physicist, but the principle holds equally whatever branch of science he is interested in, he will try and convert this individual, unique observation he has made into the terms of his science, because elephants, as such, hardly enter into physics—even modern physics. And to do this he must forget altogether that the thing he has seen is an elephant; it is, to him simply a material object possessing size and weight—say about 2 tons.

So, now, what he has got out of his observation is that a certain object weighing 2 tons is sliding down Madingley Hill. And he will go further and leave out the 'object' part of it. What for the physicist is sliding down Madingley Hill is simply and only, '*2 tons*'. And this process of translation must be applied to all the elements of the whole fact which is before him. The fact that it is Madingley Hill doesn't matter to him, the fact even that it is a hill isn't even interesting. And 'Tuesday afternoon' is of course, wholly irrelevant.

And when the whole process of translation is finished the result will be something like this:—'2 tons is sliding down an incline plane set at an angle of 45° and 100 feet in length, and the time taken to slide this distance, starting from rest, is 15.4 seconds.' That is his *fact*, and the conclusion he can draw? Well, I suppose he can tell you, among other things, what the coefficient of friction is—but I am not scientist enough to say what else he can tell you.

11. Now, what has the scientist done? If this is an example of scientific thinking, what can we say about it?

First, we saw that the scientist abstracted himself from his observation.[8] The whole *fact* was, of course, 'A scientist observing an Elephant sliding down Madingley Hill', but the scientist himself only made use of half of it—he left himself out. The reason for this is obvious. To some extent we each live in separate worlds, my sensations cannot be yours, my toothache cannot be yours. But if this were the only world of which we knew anything we should be shut away from human intercourse. Hence arises the desire to describe the connections between things not in terms of personal sensations but in terms which do not depend upon any particular sensations. And to do this, we forget ourselves and assume a purely objective world.

Secondly, he left out the facts of time (when it happened) and place (where it happened) and also the fact that it was an elephant, and reduced his observation to what could be expressed in terms of exact measurement. Science, you see, is not interested in the individual fact, this or that particular occurrence in its particularity, but is interested in it only in so far as it can be made an example of a general law. And the only things which science is interested in are those which are susceptible of physical measurement.

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[8] A.N. Whitehead, *The Concept of Nature* (New York: Dover Publications, 2004 [1920]), p. 3: 'Nature is that which we observe in perception through the senses. In this sense-perception we are aware of something which is not thought and which is self-contained for thought … we can think about nature without thinking about thought. I shall say that then we are thinking "homogenously" about nature.'

Science asks of everything, 'Are you susceptible of measurement?' And if something answers, 'No'; then Science says, 'Go away!' A simple way of being exact, you may think. But is there anything not susceptible of measurement? Yes and No. There is nothing that we know of which cannot be measured in some way or other; everything has a measurable aspect, and so everything can be made the object of scientific thinking. But, again, there is nothing we know of which has nothing but a measurable aspect, because, and this is the important point, measurableness, materiality *is* abstract, it is something which does not and cannot exist by itself.

You will remember how our scientist abstracted himself from the whole situation, and then he went on to abstract all the individual qualities from the situation—and the whole process is one of abstraction, of leaving out what isn't measurable in one of the recognized ways of measurement. And the whole object of this abstraction is just so as to make the result what is called 'accurate'. You can't say anything accurate about an elephant sliding down Madingley Hill on Tuesday afternoon, but you can about 2 tons sliding down an incline plane at an angle of 45° to the horizon.

12. Let us sum up our conclusions on this point. Science is the study of the quantitative relationships of the phenomena of the physical world. There is nothing in this world which cannot be measured in some way or other, most things can be measured in more ways than one. But any aspect of any thing which is not capable of measurement in this way is of no interest to science whatever. And everything has aspects of this kind—everything, for example, is individual, is unique, but this aspect of its existence is not measurable scientifically.

The fact that Newton's apple was a Ribstone Pippin—if it was—didn't help him, didn't interest him, qua scientist. The world of Scientific thinking is a world of mechanism, everything in it is a machine—the human body as a whole and each organ in it, flowers, your dog, the stars in their courses, elephants sliding down hills, and even the human mind itself—all these, for science, are machines. They may have aspects which are not mechanistic—but that does

not enter into scientific thinking; in fact, we *know*, that everything has aspects which are not mechanistic. The scientific fact, Newton's apple, is isolated from its historical setting and reduced to the status of a mere instance of a rule.

13. And what kind of thinking is this?—for, you will remember, what we have got to decide about it is, Is it concrete thinking or is it abstract thinking?

Abstract thinking, you will remember, we discovered to be abstract because it thought about *objects* that were abstract, that is, partial, incomplete, one-sided; and concrete thinking was concrete because it thought about the whole of things, and about things only which were a whole.

What is the verdict then? It seems to me that even a British jury could not absolve scientific thinking from the charge of being abstract. It is taken red-handed. Science is not a true, a complete, description of one kind of thing—because we have seen that there is nothing which cannot be an object for scientific thinking—but it is an abstract, arbitrary, and therefore erroneous, description of all things. Only the measurable aspect of things interests scientific thinking; and the notion that the merely measurable, the merely mechanistic, is complete, whole, real, concrete,—or anything but abstract, partial, incomplete, unreal—is absurd. We are tempted to say that nothing could be more abstract, but we have seen that it is a much more difficult matter to decide the degree of abstractness of any kind of thinking than to decide that this or that kind of thinking is abstract in some degree or other.

14. We do not, then, deny that social science, this projected science of Society, is a science—so far as we can see it has amply made good its claim to the title—but we can say, now that we know what a science is, that it is not the concrete thinking about Politics which we are looking for. It has proved itself to be abstract thinking.

Whether we can find concrete thinking anywhere, whether there is such a thing as a true philosophy of politics, is another matter; what we know at present is that this Science of Society is not what

we want, and therefore can neither be held to be a contribution to concrete thinking about Politics nor to be in any sense a criticism of the methods or results of such thinking.

15. It may have occurred to you that our Science of Society is not so much a single science as a collection of different, and in some respects independent, sciences, and that possibly some of these subordinate social sciences might have more to be said in their favour than the Science of Society asa whole.

Of course, if any of those subordinate social sciences are really sciences, and prove themselves to be so, we need not say anything more about them than that, since they are sciences, they deal with abstractions and not with what is concrete. But the difficulty often is to see whether this or that kind of thinking really is or is not scientific thinking in this strict sense. And, because this applies to two such social sciences in particular, I want to say a word about them. They are Economics and Psychology.

16. Economics, it is said, is the Science of Wealth. But what kind of wealth? Wealth which is measurable, wealth which is of a certain kind. Everything has an economic value, but that is not the only value that it possesses; and there is nothing which has only an economic value.[9] This is just what we said of natural science, everything is measurable but there is nothing which is simply measurable and nothing more.

'A country', says Mill, 'would hardly be said to be richer however precious a possession it might have in genius, in virtues or the

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[9] [Oakeshott's marginal note reads: 'Pictures—the Mond and Iveagh bequests—letters in *Times*. (i) £30,000, (ii) £300,000.' A letter from Martin Conway appeared in the *Times*, 28 January 1928, noting disagreements over the value of these two recent bequests of paintings to the National Gallery and Kenwood House in London: 'A well-known critic … mentioned £250,000 as the approximate value of the 40 odd pictures which comprise the Mond bequest. Yet no less an authority than Sir Joseph Duveen told me personally that, in his opinion, ten of these pictures alone were worth £400,000.']

accomplishments of its inhabitants.'[10] Why not? Because value of this sort is not economic value and so has nothing to do with the Science of Economics. 'Wealth', in Economics, is a technical term, and technical language, we have seen already, is abstract language.[11] The laws which economists are able to lay down respecting rent, profits, wages, prices and so on, are only true in so far as the persons concerned are free from the influence of any other motives than what are properly called economic motives.

Economics deals not with whole human beings whose motives are many and incalculable and whose interests are not confined, but with man as ruled by economic motives alone, with an 'economic man', with that is, an abstraction. Economics is a unified series of thoughts with regard to a particular department of human life. Economics is not a true description of one kind of action or thing, but an abstract, arbitrary, partial, incomplete description of all action and all things. It is a science, and, as such, is abstract thinking. It is not itself concrete, and cannot be held to contribute to what is concrete thinking or to criticize concrete thinking.

17. With psychology, so-called social psychology, we are in a more difficult position because there exists an almost invincible prejudice in its favour. Psychology, at any rate, it is said, is philosophy. Psychology, it is said, must be the basis upon which to build any philosophical thinking about Politics. But, in fact, nothing could be further from the truth.

Now, the main difficulty about psychology is that it is the last of the sciences to come out from under the withering domination of philosophy. Formerly it used to be regarded as part of philosophy, as indeed did all natural sciences, and while it was in that position it was a barren study. But now, nothing is more certain than that

[10] J.S. Mill, *Principles of Political Economy*, Bk 1 ch. iii (*CW*), ii. 49. [Cp. p. 63 n. 14, above.]

[11] Ruskin and Ricardo. 'There is no Wealth but Life. Life, including all its powers of love, of joy, of admiration. That country is richest which nourishes the greatest number of noble and happy human beings.' [Cp. p. 63 n. 14, above.]

no psychologist is worth listening to who does not keep as close as possible to the empirical facts. Psychology is the study of mind as a physical phenomenon. It studies the mind and its workings in exactly the same way as the psychologist studies the body and its workings.

To the physiologist the body is a machine, nothing that is not measurable with regard to it is interesting, nothing which is purely individual is significant. To the psychologist, the mind is a machine, and he achieves this mechanistic outlook simply by refusing to see anything else. It is a process of abstraction, it is the characteristic process of natural science. And this is true of whatever kind of psychology we like to mention, as true of the so-called individual psychology as of the so-called social psychology.[12]

Psychology does not offer a true description of one kind of human action, but an abstract, arbitrary, incomplete description of all human action. It is a science, and therefore it is abstract thinking.[13] Psychology is no nearer related to philosophy, to concrete thinking, than any other natural science. Philosophy, if it is to achieve anything at all, must remain completely indifferent both to the affirmations and to the negations of psychology.

18. So these are our conclusions. We have been inveigled down a blind alley, we have asked for bread and been given a stone—or a viper, I don't know which to call it. Neither the Science of Society, nor any properly so-called social science, is concrete thinking about politics, is a philosophy of politics. They are not philosophy, do not contribute to philosophy, and cannot be held to criticize philosophy.

19. I have often said that what is not itself concrete thinking cannot be said even to contribute to concrete thinking, but there is a view which supposes that philosophy is the science of sciences, and that political philosophy is, consequently, the science of the political

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[12] The idea of there being two different kinds of psychology—individual and social—is, of course, absurd.

[13] Cf. Bosanquet, *Philosophical Theory of the State*, Ch. 7, 'Psychological Illustration of the Idea of a Real or General Will.'

sciences. This view is so wrong headed and absurd that it hardly needs refutation; but it is so common that it does require mention. It is, however, easier to suppose that two blacks will make a white, than to suppose—if we really understand what we mean by abstract and concrete—that two, or any number of, kinds of abstract thinking will add up to that single and unique kind of thinking we have called concrete or philosophical.

The notion is, of course, a legacy of the days when everything was philosophy and a legacy which we shall do well to refuse to inherit. Philosophy, in a sense, cannot contradict any of the conclusions of any of the abstract kinds of thinking. And, again, where there can be no contradiction there can be no criticism, no supplementation—in short, no argument. For the present, we shall do well to apply this principle rigidly. Philosophy is no more the science of the sciences, no more made by the adding together of a number of abstract kinds of thinking, than the 'general will' in Rousseau is the 'will of all'. The two things are of a different kind.

Historical Thinking about Politics

1. We were engaged last time in discussing the claim of a so-called Science of Society to be philosophical thinking about Politics. We were led to this discussion by the discovery that a philosophy of politics was not any kind of thinking about politics, but a particular kind of thinking about it; and its characteristic quality we have called its concreteness. Many different kinds of thinking about politics have claimed this quality of concreteness, but, by an examination of what we mean by concreteness we discovered that, since only *one* kind of thinking could be concrete—though many could be abstract—a great many of these claims could not be substantiated.

In fact, the most liberal terms we found ourselves able to offer these claimants to a title often eagerly, but usually ignorantly sought, were that only one of them *might* win it, and possibly none of them. At any rate, the conditions on which the title might be rightfully claimed are clear: what we have to ask of each claimant is, 'Abstract or Concrete?' Some, without thinking, answer, 'Concrete, of course' in the same way as a man might answer the question, 'Are you a gentleman?' But the kinds of thinking which answer in this way are under a misapprehension; it is no dishonour, it is no reflection on their sincerity or usefulness, to admit that they are abstract.

Natural Science, indeed, we saw, has realized this, and has, of late, more readily admitted its abstract character, and has thereby became both freer and more useful—it never did anyone any good to try and appear to be what he was not. And so, our conclusion was that scientific thinking about anything whatever, politics included, is abstract thinking. This measurable, mechanistic world which is the world of science, whether it be the science of chemistry, physics, biology, psychology, economics or of social welfare, is an abstract world. It does not offer what we are eager to find,—concreteness. We must, evidently, look elsewhere for that.

2. And to-day I propose to look at what I have called Historical Thinking about politics, to see whether that possesses the quality of concreteness which would warrant us saying, 'Here is a kind of thinking about politics which can properly be called a philosophy of politics.' In our vague way, we are not accustomed to regard History as a kind of thinking; as a particular way of thinking about things which can also be thought about in other ways.[1]

But there, as often before, we are wrong. We didn't think, until we looked carefully, that the ordinary process of perception was a kind of thinking. So history, also, is a kind of thinking; nothing which, so to speak, passes through our minds can avoid being a kind of thinking. In fact, all that we ever do to things may be described as thinking about them in one way or another. Our thinking may be very quick so that we don't recognize it, or it may go further than mere thinking—but none the less it is, or starts with, thinking.

3. Now, with regard to the philosophy of politics two claims have, at various times, been made on behalf of history or historical thinking. (i) Sometimes it is actually claimed that historical thinking about politics, that an historical view of society in general or of a particular society, itself gives a philosophy of politics, itself *is* concrete thinking about politics. (ii) And at other times it has been claimed that, if this view is not quite true, at any rate historical thinking, an historical view, or study, is the only sound *basis* upon which to build a philosophy of politics. These two claims have been preferred, and our business is to try and see clearly what is intended by them.

4. The first of these claims—that which says that an historical view of society is itself a philosophy of society—has been made in three different forms; or rather, of the many forms in which it has been made the most important can be reduced to three.

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[1] Cp. R.M. MacIver, *The Modern State* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926), for pseudo-historical thinking. Nothing can be historical without being something else first.

(a) The first of these forms has been called the 'philosophy of history'. The notion is, that if we could discover any general laws which govern the history of the world, we should have created out of a mass of, at first sight, rather disconnected events and characters, a real whole, and this whole is a philosophy. It is an attempt to discover the general laws which govern *the whole* course of history: history, of course, meaning *the whole* story, in all its ascertainable detail, of man's life on the earth and such natural events as can be intimately connected with him. These laws are regarded as the unchanging truths of which the different events recorded in history are instances. The facts, the events themselves, are settled by the historian proper, and when settled they enter the province of the philosopher, who, by the discovery of these general laws, makes a philosophy.

For example, the historian may say, 'The French Revolution produced Napoleon', and from that, and by means of reference to other similar facts, the general law that, say, 'Anarchy is followed by despotism', might be deduced. And when all events that ever happen in human history are brought under some law of this sort, then we shall have a philosophy, then we shall have true philosophical thinking, concrete thinking about the course of human life on this planet. That is the claim.

(b) But the claim that historical thinking about society, about politics, is concrete has sometimes been made in a less grandiose form, and a form which does not strike us, at first, as being really historical. Nevertheless I think it is so. This particular claim has been made under several names, but the most common one, nowadays, is Anthropology.[2] The argument is roughly this.

Civilization—the whole of men's manners and customs, the sum of his physical, mental and moral achievements—is thought to be a progressive movement in a definite direction, according to fixed

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[2] [MS del: '7. (i) This Science of Societies is usually called Anthropology, though many of those who have written about it prefer the name Sociology. But whatever we call it, the conception which lies behind the name is this.']

laws. 'These laws once understood, we may calculate towards what goal we are tending and what we may expect in the future, even as the astronomer foretells the movements of the heavenly bodies.'[3] If we look to the past history of human societies we can see the earlier stages of this development, just as we can discover in fossils and other 'remains' earlier forms of existing physiological structures.

As in the physical world we can recognize the less developed and the more developed organism, so among these various 'societies'—or 'social organisms', as some have called them—we can recognize something which we can call primitive, embryonic; and something also which we can call more developed, mature. This process of recognition, the effort to detach and classify discoveries of this kind about human societies, is called Anthropology; and it[4] is occupied with the principles which underlie all human societies considered in a process of development.[5]

The data for this study is gathered from various sources. Partly from what we ordinarily call history, partly from the observation of existing societies in all stages of development, and partly from the results of other studies and sciences like comparative philology, geography, and geology.

When it has gathered together the vast mass of facts which are to be discovered, it is the business of this study to draw from it principles which can give to variety some sort of unity. One day, perhaps, says a writer on this subject, this study will determine with precision what is common to the individuals of all human peoples. We have before us a plurality of civilizations, all of which contribute

[3] F. Müller-Lyer, *The History of Social Development*, intro. L.T. Hobhouse and E.J. Urwick, tr. E.C. Lake and H.A. Lake (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1920), p. 35.

[4] [MS del: 'is a science which may be defined as the Science of Societies in the same way as Biology is taken to be the science of life. This science']

[5] B. Kidd, 'Sociology', *Encyclopedia Britannica*, xxv. 323. ['Sociology … must be regarded as a science occupied quite independently with the principles which underlie human society considered as in a condition of development'.]

to some single line of development, or, at any rate, all of which follow general laws of growth and development.[6]

And were we really to discover something which we could call the normal line of development in the growth of the social organism, it would afford at least a useful guide to legislators and governors in their provision for the future.

Let me give you some examples of the kind of questions which this Anthropology tries to answer, and the kind of results it achieves. If we have before us a number of independent societies, if we know something of their past history, of the way in which they have developed, can we not, for example, come to some conclusion on such questions as, What is the relation in a society between structure and growth? Up to what point is structure necessary to growth? After what point does it retard growth? At what point does it arrest growth?

Or again, the principle which Sir Henry Maine formulated, that social organization passes from one of status to one of contract, that is that a society in which, like in feudal England, a man's position is determined by his membership of the group he belongs to, is more primitive than one in which each man is free to enter into contracts and so freely determine his position,—such a principle as this is one of the findings of this study.

Now, for the past century almost, an attempt has been made to build this up into a science of something of the same nature as the analytical sociology we discussed last time; but this attempt may be said to have failed. It is, of course, believed not to have failed by some of its professors; but the arguments for its failure seem to me conclusive. For those of you whom it interests I would suggest that the discussion in River's pamphlet called *History and Ethnology*

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[6] [MS del: 'The Science which makes it its business to formulate these laws is this Science of Societies. And what is the final result at which this science aims? Perhaps that would be best described by saying again that its results will be with regard to civilizations what the results of biology are to physical life. Some may doubt the value of many branches of this great science of Societies.—Spencer, *The Study of Sociology*.]

presents a very fair view of the modern position.[7] Maitland, a great many years ago now, summed up the situation when he said: 'It is my belief that by and by anthropology will have the choice between being history and being nothing.'[8]

And what has happened is that it has become history. We can go to the various primitive societies which exist to-day, we can draw conclusions about the social life and civilizations of the past from 'remains' of various sorts which have come down to us; that is, we can find out a great deal about *what happened* in those times or in these places; but can we go any further? I think not. We have not enough facts from which to draw scientific conclusions: and the facts we have are not of the right kind. We have not enough facts to say what is normal and what is abnormal in the growth of societies: we have no knowledge of what a 'normal' as opposed to a 'violent' death of a society is.

Nor, indeed, have we got any certainly separate examples which we can classify: for unless we can prove that our examples are really separate, all chance of making an inductive science disappears. So, Anthropology has chosen to be *history*; it is an *historical* form of thinking. We cannot say that Father-right always follows Mother-right as a method of inheritance; we cannot say that inhumation is a primitive institution which societies always practise before they reach the more developed method of cremation of the dead; but we can say that here, in this society, one preceded the other, and in that society the opposite process took place. That is, we can make historical statements about primitive societies, but not scientific statements.

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[7] W.H.R. Rivers, *History and Ethnology* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge; New York and Toronto: The Macmillan Co., 1922). ['During the last ten years...a movement has brought [history and ethnology] into much closer relationship...twenty or thirty years ago...anthropology was wholly under the dominance of a much cruder evolutionary standpoint', p. 3.]

[8] F.W. Maitland, 'The Body Politic', in *Collected Papers*, 3 vols, ed. H.A.L. Fisher (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911), iii. 295.

(c) The third form [of] the claim that historical thinking itself supplies a concrete view, a philosophy, of society is less ambiguous. It says in so many words, 'Show us the history of a society and I will show you its philosophy.' 'Reality is history,' as a modern writer has put it. If you want to know the real nature of a thing, if you want to see something as a whole, concretely—then got to its history. This has been said of a great number of things, and among them of political life.

Professor Westermarck, having the notion that all our moral judgments arise from individual emotions, set about to prove his thesis by an examination of ideas of right and wrong among all peoples and at all times. The nature of moral judgments was to be ascertained, he thought, by means of historical thinking. Or again, it is asserted that Aristotle's theory of the State—a philosophical theory—is based upon an examination of 150 different constitutions which, it is said, he undertook. If this were true, Aristotle would be a forerunner of the modern school which holds that 'Reality is History', but we know that Aristotle thought no such thing. To imagine him making a theory of the State by examining the fortunes of 150 examples is to imagine him as an American professor of Political Science.

5. So much, then, for the three forms which this claim that historical thinking is concrete thinking has taken. But before we go on to examine the validity of this claim we ought to notice a modification of it which is even more common than the full claim itself. This modification says, roughly, that although Reality may not be History, although historical thinking may not itself be concrete thinking, at any rate it is *the basis* for all sound philosophical theory;—it is the foundation at least, even if it is not the superstructure.

Or, as it is sometimes said, with regard to the philosophy of politics, the historian discovers the facts which the philosopher interprets. Happily this claim will not require a separate examination. For, (i) if historical thinking proves to be concrete thinking, then it *is* philosophy and we need have no talk of foundation and superstructure, facts and interpretations; and (ii) if

historical thinking turns out to be abstract, then, as we have seen it cannot be thought of as contributing to, contradicting, or criticizing concrete thinking, and again talk of foundation and superstructure will be so much nonsense. Concrete thinking cannot be *founded upon* that which is abstract any more than it can *be* that which is abstract.

6. We have, then, before us historical thinking as it enters into political life. For it concreteness has been claimed; can the claim be maintained? It has often been refuted on the ground that we do not yet know enough about history and that we shall be able to tell more accurately what its possibilities are when it is a little older. But criticisms such as this seem to me altogether beside the mark. The only way of discovering whether the claim of historical thinking to be concrete thinking is justified is by finding out exactly what kind of thinking historical thinking is. A kind of thinking is concrete or abstract from beginning to end, it can never change its nature, for its nature is its end. And if historical thinking is concrete thinking, then historical thinking about politics is concrete thinking about politics; or if the one is abstract, then the other must be abstract too.

We have, then, *first* to show that historical thinking is really a separate kind of thinking, and not merely scientific thinking under another name; and *secondly* to show whether it is abstract or concrete.

7. I need not spend time in demonstrating to you that history really is a kind of thinking. In our less critical moments we may be apt to imagine that history is merely a matter of *recalling* past facts and events, and that this process of *recalling* is an 'immediate' process in which we are passive, merely receptive. But this is just as silly as thinking that what we call 'perception' is an 'immediate experience' of a totally different kind from what we call 'thinking'. In the same way as perception is thinking, an elementary kind of thinking, a quick kind of thinking, perhaps, but thinking none the less, history is thinking also. Every historian is something more than

a passive, receptive agent through which the events of the past pour themselves; he is critical, selective, he is a *thinking* agent.

8. Now, the chief and outstanding characteristic of historical thinking is that it deals always with what is individual and unique. In the language of logic, the historians' judgments are singular judgments, and consequently categorical judgments. Historical thinking examines the interrelations between things regarded as individual and unique. Things may, of course, be unique from a great number of different points of view, and the point of view which is most important for history is the uniqueness which is given to an event by *time*. History deals with things, or aspects of things, into the essence of which time enters, giving them thereby particularity and uniqueness. 'The great object of teaching history,' said Lord Bryce, 'is to enable people to realise … that there is not such a thing as a normal world.'[9]

That is to say, the first lesson of history is that the 'averages' with which science deals do not represent the individuality of things. The world of averages is an abstract world. But the world of history is made up, essentially, of that which is particular and unique. There have been many battles, but it is *this* or that battle, Bouvines or Waterloo, which the historian deals with, not battles in general. Consequently, for the historian, history *never* repeats itself: unique events cannot repeat themselves without ceasing to be unique. Both Napoleon and Alexander may have been influenced by similar motives in their attempted conquests in the East, but what is interesting to the historian is not the similarity of the motives—which must always be a matter of conjecture and of degree—but the fact that *these* were *Napoleon's* motives, and if Napoleon's, then unique; because, though motives may repeat themselves, Napoleon's motives obviously cannot.

9. Now, this characteristic of history shows it, at any rate, to be a totally different kind of thinking from what we have seen science to

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[9] [J. Bryce, 'On the Teaching of History in Schools', *Historical Association Leaflet No. 4* (London: Alexander & Shepheard, 1907), p. 4.]

be. Science, we saw, has no interest in what is unique and individual; it deals solely with what is average, what can be repeated. An elephant may only once have slid down Madingley hill—that is an historical event—but what science gets out of it is only an instance of the laws of mechanics and forgets altogether that it was either an elephant or Madingley hill. For the historian it may be significant that June 1st 1794—'the glorious first of June' when Lord Howe won his victory—was a fine day; for the scientist its 'fineness' is only significant as one figure in the calculation of the average hours of sunshine per day for the year 1794. And so on.

10. As a consequence from this, we can never argue in historical thinking that 'so and so *must* have taken place', that this or that '*must* have happened'. History asks not what *must* have happened, but only what *did* happen. Every event, for history, has a particular and unique place and time, and we can never say of a particular event that it *must* have happened in a particular way unless we know it did. The general laws of science do not enable the scientist to say anything about particular individual cases, they hold good only for the average, and so are useless in dealing which that aspect of events with which historical thinking is interested. Historical events are individual because to each is assigned, or for each is assumed, a particular place and a particular time.

Historical events, that is, are phenomenal. History assumes the existence of a world of events and facts, independent of being known each of which is individual, and then tries to work out relations of cause and effect, of before and after, which are also individual. And all of these are distinguished by being in the past. If the historian's dream came true, every single event which has ever happened in the world would be laid bare in its singularity, its relation to those events which stood near it in time and place would be revealed, and we should have one vast series of events, some of which might be connected as cause and effect, but all of which would be connected by being within this world of space and time.

11. That is the unity which historical thinking can give to things. It can show a proximate cause, it can connect in space and time; in the end it might show that nothing is an anachronism, for everything has *some* cause, can be explained *somehow*. But what sort of an 'explanation' is it that history gives? *What* is the unity with which history endows these particular, unique events?

History reveals proximate causes, reveals connections in space and time, but never reveals *necessary* connections. Indeed, when we saw that in history we can never speak of what '*must* have happened', we saw that history has no use for the distinction between *necessary* and *accidental*. There are no accidents in history; nothing is contingent. History tells us nothing of men apart from society—but this says *only* what has been, it is not a judgment of necessity, nor can any law on average be properly calculated from it. We may say that it was a 'pure accident' that William the Conqueror's horse should step on a hot ash and throw its master to the ground, so causing his death, but since that *was* the way in which William died, for history, the word 'accidental' has no meaning. *That* is how he died; it is a unique event, and if he had died in his bed it could not have been more unique, because its uniqueness lies in the fact that it was William's death, there was only one William, or so history assumes.

Or again, where is the *necessary* connection between the Pacific Ocean and its name? we might say that it is a 'pacific' ocean, but the historian would step in and say, 'No, you are wrong. That was not the 'reason' why it was called Pacific.' The reason, the historical reason, of course, is that Núñez de Balboa looked out into the Gulf of Panama and saw that *it* was calm. *That* is history. There is no necessary connection, there is no rational order. Why should the observed character of a small bay at a particular moment give a name to an ocean? From a non-historical point of view we might even say that it was all a mistake; but in history, of course, there are no mistakes. History can explain, then, but it cannot justify; it can

place an event in a temporal-spatial order of cause and effect, but it can do nothing else.

When Dicey says that 'in the ordinary course of things the law of England [with regard to property] would have been amended before the end of the eighteenth century, or soon after the beginning of the nineteenth century' but the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars delayed the changes, what does he mean by 'the normal course of events'?[10] There is no normal; what was abnormal in what actually took place? You see, he is speaking as a lawyer and not as an historian, for the historian refuses to know anything about anything except *what did actually take place*, qua its having taken place and in no other relation at all.

12. Historical thinking, then, results in a series of unique events, which are connected, in so far as they are connected, by the categories of cause and effect, and of space and time. The explanations it offers, those explanations which are characterized as 'historical explanations' are limited to this world of space and time and proximate cause and effect in space and time, and do not show rational or necessary connections. History explains things, not by placing them within the abstract whole of things physically measurable like Science, but by placing them within a world of space and time, a world which is so far *not* a whole that we are more often than not at a loss to show the rational or temporal connections between events. Also, the historical series, those singular phenomenal events in time, is one which is without an end—part of it is always in the future. We can never know the *whole*; and history gives its explanations of things by referring to a 'whole' which it can never know as a whole. The historical series is forever incomplete.

13. Now, we saw that Scientific thinking was abstract for two main reasons. (i) It leaves out of account the scientist himself

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[10] [A.V. Dicey, *Lectures on the Relation between Law & Public Opinion in England During the Nineteenth Century* (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1905), p. 123.]

and postulates facts quite independent of himself. And (ii) it is interested in only a single aspect of things—that which is physically measurable—that which is a machine. Science is not a true description of one kind of thing, but a partial, incomplete, abstract description of all things.

What are we to say about History? Is it abstract or concrete thinking? Are its objects abstract or concrete? At any rate, we can say at once that it is not abstract for exactly the same reasons as scientific thinking is abstract. Historical thinking is a different kind of thinking from Scientific thinking. And yet, in one respect it is similar. Historical thinking is abstract in the same way as science is abstract in that it leaves out the knower, the thinker himself, and postulates an objective series of facts and events wholly independent of him. On this first point it is abstract; but can we go further?

Yes, I think we can. History, also, deals with only one aspect of things, a partial, incomplete, one-sided aspect—that is, their uniqueness in time and space. Science dealt with the abstract universal, the average; history deals with the abstract individual. The whole to which it refers things for explanation is not a rational whole, but one of time, and so not really a 'whole' at all—for part of it is forever buried in the unknown future; and in consequence no single historical question can ever be finally solved, so long as a single historical fact is uncertain, all are relatively uncertain. History, then, is not a true description of one kind of thing, for we may have a history of anything. It is an incomplete, partial, arbitrary and therefore abstract description of everything. It seeks and finds in things their abstract individuality. Like science, it is abstract and not concrete thinking.

14. Historical thinking is abstract; historical thinking about politics and political life is abstract thinking. It has proved itself to be abstract, and by so doing it has proved itself to be capable neither of being, of contributing to, nor of criticizing that which is concrete thinking. Whether we shall find this concrete thinking anywhere remains yet to be seen, but we know, at any rate, that it is not historical thinking.

15. This may be difficult for us to believe, because we live in an historical age, an age which has been brought up to value an historical explanation above all other kinds of explanation—even scientific. Historical analysis and explanation has a power not short of tremendous over our minds; it is apt to satisfy us when we have been shown the historical cause, and we think we have discredited a thing or a doctrine by revealing its origin or the way and circumstances in which it developed. But in all this we are merely yielding to the prejudices and faulty logic of our age. 'We must ceaselessly remember,' says Professor Laski, 'that the monistic theory of the state was born in an age of crisis and that each period of its revivification has synchronized with some momentous event which has signalized a change in the distribution of political power,'[11] therefore it is an unsound theory. There is the apotheosis of historicism!

When dealing with a philosophical theory we must, according to Professor Laski, be at pains, above all, to think historically. Or again, he accuses some political theorists of not being content with 'the actual experiments with which history presents us',[12] he accuses them of a failure to stick to the historical facts, which is, you see, simply accusing them of concrete thinking, or an attempt at concrete thinking. The data of philosophy *is* not to be found in history: to base a study on history is immediately to make it abstract.

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[11] Laski, *Foundations of Sovereignty*, p. 233 [cp. p. 94 n. 76, above].

[12] Laski, *Foundations of Sovereignty*, p. vi.

Practical Thinking about Politics

1. Both Scientific and Historical thinking have turned out to be abstract. It was not so much a matter of *proving* them to be abstract which we undertook, but simply of seeing what they were in their essential nature, and so allowing them to demonstrate their own character. If a kind of thinking, before it has examined itself, imagines itself to be concrete, and then turns out to be abstract, it might appear to have suffered a certain loss of dignity. And, indeed, both science and history have, in the past, paraded themselves in the borrowed plumes of concrete thinking. But since the plumes are borrowed, science and history suffer only an apparent loss when they are taken away.

We hear so much nowadays about 'Truth' and the quest for truth, and no kind of thinking can justify itself unless it can somehow show that it is engaged in this quest. But, as a matter of fact, no kind of abstract thinking can be properly said to contribute to the 'truth', in the strict and full sense of the word. The Truth, in its only intelligible sense, is the whole, and the whole is not made up of abstract parts. Nevertheless, there are other things besides the truth, in the full sense, which are worthwhile, and to convict a kind of thinking of abstractness should not I think carry with it a necessary loss of dignity.

It is true, of course, that to call a kind of thinking abstract is to say that it can be called 'thinking' only by courtesy, but abstract thinking has its uses, even if it does not lead us to Truth, even if it is not really thinking at all. And one of the results which I think will follow from our discussion to-day will be that abstract thought is necessary to human existence; the whole of human life, as it is practically lived, is based on abstract thinking. Life produces abstraction in order to preserve itself, just as the biological organism grows to its environment.

2. Our subject to-day is Practical Thinking. It is clear to most of us that science is a form of thinking, and it is clear to us, when we

stop and think a moment, that history is a kind of thinking also, but it is, perhaps, more difficult to see that the Practical is a form of thought also. And, indeed, until we grasp the principle that every human activity is a form of thinking we shall not see clearly that this is the nature of Practical activity.

3. What do we mean by practical thinking, by practice? In one sense of the word, of course, there is nothing that is not a practical activity. For if we make 'practice' synonymous with 'activity' of any sort, then there is nothing in human life which cannot in some way be brought under the heading of the practical. That is what Aristotle meant when he said that 'Thought also is activity.' Even thought, you see, thought of any and every kind, produces some sort of change in the mind, if not in the external, phenomenal world.

Another way of putting this same idea is to say that behind all activity of *mind*, thinking in the proper sense, lies an activity of *will*. You cannot 'think' until you have willed to think. But this, we have seen, is a misleading way of expressing it. There is no such thing as the *will*; it is an abstraction. Kinds of thought, we have discovered already, cannot be distinguished by saying that they are each the activity of a separate 'faculty' in the mind. Nevertheless, that is one of the ways in which men have tried to distinguish practical thinking; it is, they said, the activity of the 'practical reason'. But we have already seen sufficient reason to reject this explanation, first because the practical reason, like the will, and the moral faculty and so on, is an abstraction; and secondly, if it did really exist, to differentiate between kinds of thinking by saying that each is the activity of a separate faculty is no explanation at all. It is not an intelligible differentiation.

4. All thinking is activity and therefore practical, in a wide sense, but there is a particular kind of thinking, which can be distinguished from other kinds, not by being the product of a practical faculty, but by being expressly directed towards ends which are practical. *All* thinking is practical, in the sense that it must be willed and that it in fact does produce some practical alteration of mind or

circumstance, but not all thinking is directed solely towards the production of such a practical change. By practical thinking, then, I mean here that thinking which expressly aims at producing a change, maintaining an existence unchanged, or giving criteria by which our growing, developing, changing practical life may be ruled and guided.

5. Now, it is clearly appropriate to the subject-matter of politics that a great deal of thinking connected with it should be of this practical nature. And as a consequence of this obvious fact it has often been held that the philosophy of politics is not philosophy in the strict sense at all, but is a kind of thinking which stands on the borderland between speculation and practice. And those who imagine political philosophy to be of this nature often take the opportunity of judging it from both points of view. Where it is philosophically adequate they discover some practical disadvantage and vice versa. The political philosopher is alternatively accused of inexperience in matters of practical politics or inadequate philosophical training. But what I hope to show is that any work which can properly be praised for the depth of practical political insight it displays or censured for a corresponding inexperience is not a work of political philosophy, is not concrete thinking, but abstract thinking. But before we go into that we must first discover what practical thinking really is.

6. Practical thinking in general, and practical thinking about politics in particular, is of various kinds. That is to say, there are a variety of ends, all of which can properly be called practical in the sense that they aim at maintaining an existence unchanged, producing a

change, or giving criteria to guide such processes of maintenance or change.

Practical thinking issues in a 'programme for action'; that is its widest and most general form.[1] Sometimes this programme is aimed at maintaining unchanged what exists, but more frequently it seeks to introduce some reform, either an actual change in political organization, or a change by way of the recognition of what in fact exists but is forgotten or misjudged. Some of these programmes for action, also, are concerned with what we should ordinarily call moral questions, moral rights and obligations; while others deal with things which can claim the importance of being expedient, or merely prudential, but hardly of being morally necessary.

But all these distinctions are illusory and only carry us a certain distance. In some way or other, I think, all practical thinking about politics will be found to involve a reform of some sort—either a change of mind or of outward circumstances; they all tell us what we *ought* to do, in one or other of the many senses of 'ought'. And perhaps the best way of explaining the nature of this kind of thinking is by studying a few examples from which we can draw out the principle which lies behind them, the idea which they express.

7. In the very dawn of political thinking, Plato drew up a series of proposals for the reorganization of his own community, Athens. These he embodied in part of the work known as the *Republic* and in that which is called the *Laws*. I need not now go into the exact character of his proposals. Briefly we may say that, under the influence of a system of government which he saw practised in a neighbouring state and of an ideal of life which he had inherited for his own community, he constructed a new and purer ideal and

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[1] [MS del.: 'But programmes for action are not all of the same kind, and I think it will be useful to make a distinction. It is not a very happy one, it expresses at best a half truth, it is abstract, but I think useful. Programmes for action may be direct towards (i) the expediencies of an action or (ii) the morality of an action. They may be programmes for expedient action or for moral action. And I think it will be useful to examine these separately.']

wished to embody it in institutions and an organized life thoroughly appropriate to it. It was not a matter of reorganizing the government alone, but the whole social life and ideas of the people as well. In his suggestions Plato often shows great practical sense and insight, though the workableness of his plan in detail is somewhat doubtful. At all events, in the *Republic* and the *Laws* we have—amidst a great deal of an entirely different character—the product of some of the most powerful practical thinking about political life that has ever been done.[2]

Plato's great successor Aristotle has left us the record of much thinking of this same kind, which is to be found both in the *Politics* and the *Nicomachean Ethics*. The *Politics*, like the *Republic*, tell us, among other things, what we ought to do, and the *Nicomachean Ethics* is, to a large extent, a practical treatise on morals. Not, perhaps, practical in the crude sense in which, we shall see later on, some writings about morality are practical, but none the less undeniably setting forth a moral ideal, and both exhibiting, and urging us to follow, a programme of moral action.

None of these writings of either Plato or Aristotle can be said to contain nothing but thinking with this practical end in view, thinking with a view to influencing and directing action, but all of them are partly the product of thought of this kind.

8. Later centuries have produced much thinking and writing of this same kind.[3] Some of it, like that of Locke, in his *Treatises on*

[2] [Autograph note on a separate sheet inserted in the MS at this point: '*Practical Thinking*. Illustrate with *Reforming Thinking*—Plato's *Republic*: bring out the view of life, the view of human nature and destiny which it contains, and show that this might be necessary when an idealist *philosophy* is made the basis of a reform—but that it is not inherent in such a philosophy, because if it is a philosophy, then it is not a guide to life. Plato's 'militarism', his view of civilization and the purpose of life and 'justice' are *his*, are '*opinions*' and not philosophy. It is not an Ethical theory—it is *moral prejudice*. 'Justice' with Plato is a *moral* term, not a philosophical.']

[3] [Oakeshott's reference is to Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 285, but which edition is unclear.]

Government, mixed with thinking of other kinds, and some of it evidently with no aim other than a practical one. On the one hand there are the innumerable proposals for the reorganization of society or of systems of government, many of them resulting in actual experiments. An example of this kind of practical thinking is to be found in the *Communist Manifesto* of Karl Marx, the writings of Mr G.D.H. Cole, or Bertrand Russell's extremely interesting work on our Industrial Civilizations.[4] And, on the other hand, there are the sermons and exhortations which propose to us new moral ideas and ideals and urge us to follow them,[5] like Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy*, Bishop Butler's *Sermons* and many of the works of Carlyle and Ruskin.

9. Now I am somewhat at a loss to explain why these writings, embodying the results of this particular kind of thinking which I have called Practical, should ever have claimed to be part of the literature of Political Philosophy. The claim may have originated from the firm belief that whatever Plato and Aristotle wrote was philosophy, by definition; and it is certain that in more recent years this claim has had some colour of justification lent it by the teachings of those who call themselves Pragmatists. But to explain this phenomenon is not part of the case I wish to put before you. What I wish to do is first to show that the claim has been made, and then to examine the grounds which have been alleged in its justification: and, as I hope we understood from our last lecture, no argument drawn from an examination of the history of this claim will help to justify it.

10. Now this claim, that plans for the reorganization of society or programmes for moral action are part, or the whole, of political

[4] [Probably B. Russell, *The Prospects of Industrial Civilization* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1923).]

[5] [MS del: 'there are suggestions like those put forward by the Guild Socialists and the Syndicalists and such as are to be found in Mr Bertrand Russell's extremely interesting works on our Industrial Civilization, and there are the more purely "moral" works, which suggest a changed mind rather than a changed mode of life.']

philosophy, or, vice versa, that political philosophy is a guide to conduct, telling us what we *ought* to do both in a moral sense and in the sense of presenting us with a programme of practical reform which does not come within the narrow meaning of morality,—this claim is so frequent among modern writers that I hardly need to demonstrate that it has been made, and has been made in exactly the way I have described. But, in case you should have failed to notice the insidious suggestions of writers who take this view, I will point out a few instances of it.

The claim is made, sometimes, in its most general form. Professor Hobhouse says that a philosophical enquiry is 'that which deals with the aim of life, with the standard of conduct, with all that ought to be, no matter whether it is or not'.[6] 'Social philosophy', says Mr Ginsberg, is the study of institutions 'from the point of view of what *they ought to be*'.[7] Following this line of thought, it is quite natural for Professor Laski to put forward his by no means original thesis that the criterion by which we ought to judge a philosophy of politics is to be found in its practical consequences.

'Suppose,' he says, 'that on the one hand we adopt the monist solution, what concrete difference will that make to our political life? If we are pluralists, how does that affect our activities? What, in short, are the [practical] consequences of our attitude? It is from them we may deduce its truth.'[8] And in objection to a certain philosophical theory he says that 'our political systems must be judged not merely by the ends they serve, but also by the way in which they serve those ends', implying that a philosophical theory is a judgment of the practical usefulness or moral worth of political institutions and ideas.[9]

On other occasions the claim has been made in a less generalized, but not less categorical, form. Writers have taken objection to certain

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[6] Hobhouse, *The Metaphysical Theory of the State*, p. 14.

[7] M. Ginsberg, *The Psychology of Society* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1921), p. 43 [italics in original].

[8] Laski, *Problem of Sovereignty*, p. 3 [cp. p. 134, above].

[9] Laski, *Foundations of Sovereignty*, p. 248 [cp. p. 110, above].

philosophical doctrines either because they are immoral, or because their result would be an alteration for the worse of our political life. C.E. Vaughan, who is at heart always a moralist, is continually, in his two volumes on the history of political philosophy, objecting to philosophical theories because they are immoral; and the ground for such an objection can be none other than that what is not morally right cannot be philosophically true; that is, that philosophy ought to tell us what we ought to do.[10]

Another series of writers have said that 'the theory of the real will' is philosophically unsound because it is either immoral or politically damaging. The theory of the real will is 'essentially aristocratic' and it makes 'the particular form or government that happens to exist … sacrosanct', says Mr Ginsberg.[11] Mr G.D.H. Cole says that 'if the doctrine of a real will … is accepted, all arguments for democracy … go by the board'.[12]

And Professor Laski's writings are full of statements which either make or imply this claim about philosophical theories. Here are three instances from his latest book, *A Grammar of Politics*. He says, 'it is important at the outset to insist that a true theory of politics depends above all things upon [the] rejection [of the idealist theory]. For what, at least ultimately, is involved in its acceptance is essentially the paralysis of the will.'[13] And in the chapter on 'Sovereignty', he says that 'the conception that authority, not merely is, but ought to be, limited, is fundamental to political philosophy.'[14] 'The modern theory of sovereignty … insists that there must be in every social order some single centre of ultimate reference … and

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[10] [C.E. Vaughan, *Studies in the History of Political Philosophy Before and After Rousseau*, 2 vols (Manchester: Manchester University Press; London and New York, Longman's, Green & Co., 1925).]

[11] Ginsberg, *Psychology of Society*, p. 49.

[12] G.D.H. Cole, *Social Theory*, 4th edn (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1930 [1920]), p. 92.

[13] H. Laski, *A Grammar of Politics* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1925), pp. 30–1.

[14] ibid., p. 63.

it is at least probable that it has dangerous moral consequences.'[15] And, if you remember, it was the dangerous moral consequences of a certain philosophical theory which call forth all Professor Hobhouse's energy to refute it.

11. Philosophical theories tell us what we ought to do, both morally and, in the narrow sense, politically. They are the results, therefore, of what we have called practical thinking, that is, thinking with a view to maintaining a situation unchanged, producing a change, or giving criteria for producing such a change or maintaining such a situation. This is the claim that has been made, and is made continually; and I think I have produced sufficient evidence that I am not putting up a man of straw for the sole pleasure of knocking him down again.

This is, in fact, a claim which is common to most of the writing on the so-called philosophy of politics to-day, and the tacit claim of the greater part of such writing in the past. And the question we must ask is, Is such a claim justified? If practical thinking is concrete thinking, then it is justified; if not, not. So what we have to discover is the exact nature of this kind of thinking we have called practical, and then ask the usual question, 'Abstract or Concrete?'

12. Like history, practical thinking moves in a world which is in various ways incomplete. History deals always and all the time with unique events, each having its own place in space and time, and the same is true of practical thinking. In dealing with men in ordinary, practical, circumstances the scientific statements of psychology are, as such, useless, though they may now and again afford us some suggested insight or knowledge.[16] A good psychologist, in the true scientific sense, is not, as such, a good judge of men, because he

[15] ibid., p. 44.

[16] Cp. J.H. Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (London: Burns, Oates, & Co., 1870), p. 409. ['A special preparation of mind is required for each separate department of inquiry and discussion … in a well-known passage of the Nicomachean Ethics … Aristotle says …"it is much the same mistake to put up with a mathematician using probabilities, and to require demonstration of an orator."']

is always at a loss when confronted with the unique individual practical experience. It is interesting that it is said of the greatest English psychologist of this century who died a few years ago, James Ward, that 'human nature was always something of a closed book to him, and one of his gravest faults was his lack of ready insight into the feelings of others.'[17] Practical thinking moves in a world of unique individuals, not bloodless 'averages' and lifeless 'normals'.

Practical thinking, like both science and history, deals with the phenomenal world.[18] It does not understand the statement that ideas and not things exist, or that our real world is one of objects and not things. The practical world is an objective phenomenal world, in time, and therefore changing; in space, and therefore individual. You will perhaps remember the way in which that master of practical thinking, Dr Johnson, 'disposed' of Berkeley's theory that material objects, as such, do not exist—he kicked the nearest chair to him and asked whether '*that*' did or did not exist.[19]

It is often said of some plan or other that it might be all very true in theory, but that it would not work in practice.[20] I do not wish to press this crude distinction between theory and practice, but it has a meaning. And what we usually mean by it is that if a thing seems to be coherent and consistent with itself in the world of theory it is not

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[17] J. Ward, *Essays in Philosophy With a Memoir of the Author by Olwen Ward Campbell* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1927), p. 48.

[18] Practical thinking deals with classes—usually; when it gets beyond that it deals with individual things.

[19] [See J. Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, ed. G.B. Hill, rev. L.F. Powell, 6 vols (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1964), i. 471: 'we stood talking for some time together of Bishop Berkeley's ingenious sophistry to prove the non-existence of matter, and that every thing in the universe is merely ideal. I observed, that though we are satisfied his doctrine is not true, it is impossible to refute it. I never shall forget the alacrity with which Johnson answered, striking his foot with mighty force against a large stone, till he rebounded from it, "I refute it *thus*."']

[20] [Oakeshott's marginal note reads: 'See Paper in The Nature of Deity'. Possibly a reference to J.E. Turner, *The Nature of Deity* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1927).]

necessarily so in the world of practice, and vice versa. The practical world is a limited world, with its own criteria of consistency, with its own standard of '*truth*'.

Some have held that practical truth is the only 'truth', but that introduces questions into which we cannot go now. It seems to me that a kind of consistency can be achieved in the world of practical thinking similar to that which is achieved by both science and history, and that it is neither necessary nor reasonable to suppose that the practical world is the only one we know anything about.

Another fundamental characteristic of this world of practical thinking is that it is an unfinished world, that is, the word 'ought', the words 'will be', the words 'shall be' all have a meaning in it. History, we saw, was an uncompleted series; the practical world is likewise uncompleted, but in a slightly different sense. For, while practical thinking is always striving to achieve a change, historical thinking is always striving to understand a change. This practical world is the world of morality, and morality, as you know, is an endless 'ought to be'. No sooner do we achieve some moral success than a further 'ought' rises up to urge us on. Moral life is moral growth, not moral existence; it is a series without an end, an ideal never achieved, an ideal, in fact, which to achieve is the only irreparable failure.

Again, practical thinking is confused thinking; and this is not only an empirical fact but, I think, a necessary fact also. We have seen already how our ordinary, practical way of looking at the notions of 'concrete' and 'abstract' were confused, and that they were confused because the whole assumption of practical thinking is that the material is somehow the real.

A good illustration of practical thinking is to be found in the law. Legal ideas are practical ideas considerably purified and straightened out, but still essentially of the practical world. The Self for the lawyer, as for the practical man, is the body: if you tamper with a man's body, if you stick a knife into it, you are held to be interfering with a man's self, and no argument will persuade us to the contrary. The law deals with actual individuals but with actual individuals

artificially defined. Everyone before the law is equal, but what two persons in the world have equal abilities, powers, personalities? They are equal because they are abstract.

13. To sum up, then, before we go before the jury with our case.

Practical thinking is objective, it moves in a phenomenal world and consequently leaves out the thinker from its calculations. Practical thinking, that is, is no more self-conscious thinking than is either science or history.[21]

It is, moreover, incomplete in that its world is our incomplete world, a world always waiting to be made into a real world. It is a world of time and space in which it moves; it deals with an uncompleted series. The objects of practical thinking are the things which exist at a particular moment and in a particular place. Practical thinking aims at and achieves change; its world is one of movement, of coming to be, of birth, life, growth and death.

But need I go further? May we not stop the case and dismiss the jury? Practical thinking pleads with us so persuasively that we are unable to deny that it is abstract. It is abstract because it leaves out the thinker himself; and it is abstract, also, because it deals with particulars whose particularity consists entirely in space and time. There is, perhaps, nothing so abstract as that which is at any particular moment. Our practical world is an abstract world; we are continually taking a partial view, leaving things out of account, in order to be able to deal with a situation. It is safe to say that we could not live in a consciously concrete world, a world in which everything was seen as a whole, for such a world would be neither phenomenal, nor subject to the ordinary notions of space and time.

It would be a world in which 'ought' and 'shall' would have no meaning, where growth would be an anomaly and change an impossibility. And such a world as that, is certainly not one in which practical thinking moves. Practical thinking does not give a true description of one kind of thing, but a partial, incomplete,

[21] Practical thinking = practical hanging together, etc. The practical world. We speak of 'the world'—but we mean the world for the purposes of practical life.

abstract description of everything which can come within the scope of human will and human desire. Practical thinking is thinking for a limited purpose, for the purpose of making the practical world consistent for the moment. It is, essentially, abstract thinking.

14. I have already called your attention to some of the anomalies which the claim of practical thinking to be concrete has produced in the writings of some of our political thinkers, but I think it would be helpful if I tried to make clearer the extent to which this claim nullifies a great many of the arguments current in these writings. There are two main objectives which Professor Hobhouse has brought against what he calls the idealist or metaphysical theory of the state: (i) that it gives neither a guide nor an incentive to conduct in political or individual life, and (ii) that it is in itself an immoral doctrine. He says that this theory is 'worse than useless as a guide in the problems of national life', and that its effect is to 'soften the edges of all hard contrasts between right and wrong'.[22] And he sums up his whole attitude towards it by saying that 'it is designed to turn the edge of the principle of freedom, by identifying freedom with law: of equality, by substituting the conception of discipline, of personality itself, by merging the individual in the State; of humanity by erecting the state as the supreme and final form of human association.'[23]

Now, if these were merely isolated arguments in a reasoned case there would be no need to take any notice of them, but as a matter of fact, the whole of the case of Professor Hobhouse and Professor Laski rests upon them; it is from this practical, moral attitude *alone* that they criticize the idealist theory, and I think I have shown that it is, consequently, no criticism at all. The theory itself may or may not be true, but at any rate we can safely say that neither Professor Hobhouse nor Professor Laski has offered any valid criticism of it; their argument is simply a *non-sequitur*, an *ignoratio elenchi*.

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[22] L.T. Hobhouse, *Democracy and Reaction* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1904), pp. 78–9, 83.

[23] Hobhouse, *Metaphysical Theory of the State*, pp. 23–4.

The criterion of concrete thinking can never be practical usefulness or moral purpose, it can only be logical necessity.[24] This language of Professor Hobhouse, the way he uses words such as 'freedom', 'discipline', 'equality', and 'the State', are abstract; they are words signifying things in which he believes, elements in his practical political creed, and he simply fails to understand when they are used with a concrete meaning, referring to what *is* and not what *ought to be*.

15. But 'philosophy', too, has, on occasions, overstepped its mark. It has claimed to be a guide to practice, it has claimed a moral authority; but such a claim is false. Philosophy is not a guide to moral or political conduct, and the conduct which is hypothetically supposed to follow from a certain philosophy is not a criterion of the truth of that philosophy. The practical world is made up of past, present, and future; it gives meaning to 'ought' and 'will be', and 'has been'.

But philosophy knows nothing about 'ought', its only verb is, 'is'.[25] And this should be clear enough if we only took the trouble to think. We do not judge whether a theory of comedy is a good or a bad theory by seeing whether it makes us laugh or not. A joke can be judged by this standard, but a theory of humour cannot. And what Hobhouse and Laski are saying is (so to speak) that the idealist theory is a bad one because it does not make us laugh. But a philosophical theory cannot be judged by this practical standard, and the repercussions of a theory on the practical world are not *necessary*, but merely historical. 'In the bombing of London I had just witnessed', says Hobhouse, 'the visible and tangible outcome

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[24] Cp. Bosanquet, *Logic*, II. end.

[25] [Oakeshott appears to be citing a different edition of F.H. Bradley, *Ethical Studies* to the 1876 edition referred to above, as the remark he presumably had in mind, that 'All philosophy has to do is "to understand what is," and moral philosophy has to understand morals which exist, not to make them or give directions for making them', appears there at p. 174 rather than at p. 193.]

of a false and wicked doctrine …[the Hegelian theory of the god-state].'[26]

If, as Hobhouse says, this theory is a philosophical theory, then the notion that its outcome was visible and tangible, was in the practical world, is pure nonsense. You cannot dispose of a philosophical theory by saying that it is wicked any more than you can dispose of a theory of laughter by saying that it is not funny. 'To preach morality is easy', says Schopenhauer, 'to give a rational ground for it is hard.'[27] Whether this is true or not, at least it is certain, that to preach it is not to give it a rational ground, and to give it a rational ground is not the same thing as to preach it. 'Tell me,' says Fichte, 'what sort of a man he is, [how he acts] and I will tell you what philosophy he will choose.'[28] It may be possible by a lucky guess, but there is no *necessary* relation between any philosophical theory and practical activity, when both are understood to be what they are.

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[26] Hobhouse, *Metaphysical Theory of the State*, p. 6.

[27] [Schopenhauer's maxim *'Moral predigen ist leicht, Moral begründen schwer'* is the motto on the title page of '*Preischrift über die Grundlage der Moral*' (*Prize essay on the Foundation of Morality*), in *Werke*, iv, at p. 103, and is a paraphrase of his own remark in '*Über den Willen in der Natur*' (*On the Will in Nature*) that '*Moral-Predigen leicht, Moral-Begründen schwer ist*': see *Werke*, iv, at p. 140.]

[28] [Probably an allusion to J.G. Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, tr. P. Heath and J. Lachs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 16: 'What sort of a philosophy one chooses depends, therefore, on what sort of a man one is.']

Pseudo-Philosophical Thinking about Politics

1. I have called these lectures the Philosophical Approach to Politics, but perhaps you will have wondered whether all you are to get is only an approach to the Philosophical Approach to Politics. Frankly, I doubt whether you are going to get any more than this; for I have not very much more to offer. That, of course, sounds all very 'philosophical', in the accepted sense of the word: no philosopher of repute deals in more than the prolegomena to his subject. But the reason for this, which is somewhat of an exaggeration, is not that philosophers are really triflers where knowledge is concerned, but that this process of thinking things out to the end is a long and difficult process which no individual can hope to get very far with.

However, I shall not consider that I have altogether wasted my time, and I hope you will not think that you have wasted yours, if I do not get further than showing you what, in general, I take philosophical thinking to be (and especially philosophical thinking about politics), and only go into details in order to illustrate the general principles. I have not got a complete philosophy of politics to give you, and if I had I could not possibly give it to you in the couple of lectures which remain. What I take my less ambitious task to be, is to give you some kind of criteria by which to judge those political philosophies which may from time to time be offered to you.

2. It would I think be less than the truth to say that so far we have been engaged on a work of mere destruction, for the very good reason that in the realm of thinking there is, and can be, no such thing as 'mere destruction', 'merely negative' ideas. To deny something is to make a positive statement: the reasons that we give for making, the grounds of, a destructive criticism, are always positive. In philosophy it is impossible merely to destroy, because destruction proceeds from a positive ground, and it is the ground, and not the mere fact of destruction, that is interesting in philosophy. Some philosophers prefer to describe themselves as

critical and not speculative, but the distinction is illusory; criticism must imply a positive ground.[1]

In the language of logic, there is no such thing as a purely negative judgment. We might say that what we have been doing so far is to follow out a process of negative definition; but even that says too little. At all events, what we must do now, is to try and see a little more clearly what the positive ground is which we have used as the basis of our denial of the concreteness of scientific, historical, and practical thinking. What is implied in the series of denials we have so far made? I can add nothing to what I have said already: allI can hope to do is to make it clearer, to turna negative into an affirmative.

3. We have been trying to find something which we have called concrete thinking about politics, but so far we have been baulked in our enterprise by a series of kinds of thinking, all of which turned out to be separate, and abstract. And if we turn to the literature of the so-called philosophy of politics itself we shall, I think, suffer a certain amount of disappointment there also. You can see that my task would be considerably lightened—and yours also—if I could point to even a single example of this pure, concrete thinking about politics; but, so far as I know, that is not yet to be found anywhere. On more than one occasion in the history of Europe it has come within an ace of being accomplished but, either because the time was not yet ripe for a proper differentiation of kinds of thinking, or because the heat of actual political desires and conflicts clouded alike the minds of writers and readers, it has always failed of full achievement.

Plato's *Republic* contains the conclusions and the reasoning out of many different kinds of thinking; neither Plato nor Aristotle, in their writings on political life, ever quite forgot their desires, ever quite rose out of the abstract world in which 'ought' and 'will be' have meaning. Or rather, on occasions both of them did achieve a concrete view, but neither has left to us any one work in which

[1] See C.D. Broad, *Scientific Thought: A Philosophical Analysis of Some of its Fundamental Concepts* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1923).

concrete thinking is entirely unmixed with these other, abstract views. The same is true of Spinoza, of Hobbes, and of Rousseau; while it may be said of such writers as Machiavelli, Montesquieu, and Locke that they *never* achieve a concrete view, theirs is unmixed abstract thinking about political life. It is either historical, or practical, or a mixture of both, but, in any case, irredeemably abstract.

Rousseau, perhaps, has come as near as anyone to a consistently concrete view of political life, but how far short the *Contrat Social* falls of the real thing, we have only to read it to discover. Hegel, too, has his moments of real concrete thinking about politics, but the *Philosophie des Rechts* constantly lapses into abstraction. Hegel himself condemned all the fallacies of abstraction I have mentioned, but that did not prevent him, at moments, from speaking as if he really believed that historical thinking were concrete thinking. It is on the question of the nature of history that his political thinking is, I think, deficient. It was Heine who started the legend that Hegel, like all political philosophers, simply devised philosophical justifications for all the interests of his own state,[2] but it is only partially true, and just in so far as it is true Hegel fails to be a political philosopher at all.

Later writers, under the baleful influence of either history, or psychology, or reforming enthusiasm, have without exception produced works which fail to be thoroughly and comprehensively concrete in their thought. Nevertheless, in many of these works we have hints of concrete thinking which have not been entirely obscured by abstract considerations and illustrations. And we must make what we can of those hints.

4. I want now to try and put before you a little more definitely than I have so far succeeded in doing this idea of concrete thinking; for in so far as we really understand the nature of concrete thinking we understand philosophical thinking. The way in which we come to understand or 'know' anything is by referring it to an appropriate environment or 'world'. Things as entirely separate and isolated

[2] [Oakeshott's reference, 'VI. 68', has not been traced.]

cannot be understood; it is only in so far as they are seen to fit in to a known, or partially known, environment or 'world' that they can be said to be known.

And, as you can readily see, this process of fitting something into an environment, is a process in which both the thing and the environment will undergo some change, will be known to us more fully. This 'environment' (I cannot think of another word to use for it, though this one is misleading) may be called a 'world' because, so far as it is really understood and known, it forms some kind of a unit or universe, it has some element of apparent self-sufficiency or completeness about it. Examples of 'worlds' of this kind to which we refer our experiences in order to understand them, in order really to experience them, are easy to find.

Each one of us has, in this sense, a kind of private world of thoughts and experiences, which we call our 'selves' or our 'Experience', to which we refer all our fresh experiences as they come to us. Or, rather, their 'coming to us' is simply a process of referring them to the more or less coherent whole of experience we all have. And, when we do not understand something that we meet, or fail to notice something which comes our way, it is simply because no place could be found for it in the world of our experience. Or again, when we deny something, when we say, 'No, that did not happen in that way', what we mean is that our world of experience, in order to keep its unity, must reject something which comes to it looking like a fact.

Our world of experience is the criterion by which we judge things; and the more we experience, the better that criterion will be, the more valuable will be our judgments.

Other examples of these worlds of experience are to be found in Natural Science, in History, and in Practical thinking. It is by referring our 'facts' to these worlds of discourse, by finding them a place, by fitting them in, that we understand them as 'facts'. So, all our various ways of abstract thinking are processes of referring fresh experiences to appropriate worlds of abstract experiences in order to understand them. And the acquisition of 'knowledge'—

historical, scientific, or any other kind of 'knowledge'—is a process of continual slight violation of the unity of our experience which results in a wider and more complete unity than before.

And it is only in terms of these worlds of discourse, these little 'universes', that conceptions of truth and reality may be understood. What is true, what is, for example, 'historically true', is that which has a place in the unified world of history, is that which does not violate the unity of that world of thinking. That which cannot be fitted in, that which this moving, changing unity we call the world of history has no place for, is false, not true, not what really took place. And so on. This is historical thinking; this is how we become aware of historical facts.

5. But here a difficulty arises. If these so-called 'worlds' are abstract, then they are not in the full sense 'worlds' at all. Because 'abstract' means partial, incomplete; and 'world' means that which is a whole, a unity. And so we have the contradiction of a 'partial whole'. But is there (the question occurs), is there a world of discourse which is not abstract, is there a unity which is not incomplete, a whole which is not partial?

If these abstract 'wholes' are really only shadows, of what are they shadows? And so there is born in our minds the idea of a universe which is *the* whole, outside of which nothing exists and which, consequently, can claim a real unity, a real completeness and not the mere shadow of it. And if these lesser worlds of discourse could be called 'worlds' only by analogy, then the 'truth' which consists in winning a place in one of them, is 'truth' only by analogy, and the 'reality' with which these 'worlds' endow things is not a finally 'real' reality, but only an abstract, partial reality.

The truth that is really true, and the reality that is really real, belongs, clearly only to these things which have a place in the real whole, *the* whole, the universe. Or, if you like, it belongs to that aspect of a thing, that view of a thing, which has a place in the real whole, the universe. Concrete thinking, then, may be described as the attempt to see things, to place experiences not within this or that lesser 'world' of discourse, but within the complete world, the

whole; and this is to see things, for the first time, as they really *are*, to see the truth of things in the complete sense of 'truth'.

Concrete thinking is an effort to find out what things really are, and nothing else whatever. And this can be discovered only by referring them to a real, concrete, world of discourse and not an abstract 'world'; by referring them to the universe.

That such a world exists is, as I have shown, a necessary implication of the notion of knowledge in any sense; the abstract assumes and implies the existence of the concrete, partiality assumes completeness somewhere. Nor need we, I think, be put off by those who assert that this concrete whole may exist, must exist, but *we* cannot know anything about it. We do at least know that it must exist if we are to be said to *know* anything about anything, and we know also something of its specific nature. The unknowable, to which some people retire, is an absurd idea because it is self-contradictory, it is nonsensical.

6. Now, clearly, the more we know about this complete whole, which we have called *the* whole, the more we shall know about things as they really are; and the more we discover about things as they really are, the more we shall know about this whole to which they belong. It is a reciprocal process. And before I go any further I wish to point out two characteristics of this real universe, the world of concrete thinking, two characteristics which are implied in its being the real universe. I must be dogmatic because there is no time to be anything else, but I hope you will see the ground for the assertions.

(i) This universe is a unity. Some people have played with the notion that this ultimate whole is a plurality, but the idea seems to me to be self-contradictory. That which contains everything cannot itself be a plurality. It may *contain*, in some way or other, a plurality; but it, seen as a whole, must be a unity of some kind. Natural science may, and does, contain a great many individual ideas, but it contains, and can contain, no *isolated* ideas. Its title to being a kind of thinking rests upon the degree of unity with which it can

endow the various ideas which its different departments and studies produce and use.

That which is entirely isolated, entirely unrelated, is that which does not exist. The *isolated* is an abstraction; something which we can never experience; for to experience something means to break down its isolation. And what is true of natural science is true *a fortiori* of the real universe. An ultimate plurality, in the sense of a number of permanently isolated and wholly unrelated elements, is something we can neither experience in any way, nor properly call a universe in any sense. It is a denial of the presupposition of all thinking.

(ii) This unity, this ultimately real whole of things, is not a constructed, or built up whole, but an existing whole.[3] It is misleading to speak of it as *all of experience*; it is *the whole of experience*. Experience, human experience, is continually increasing; the world is growing older and riper in experience every day.[4] And if this ultimately real whole of experience, this universe were just *all of experience*, then concrete thinking would forever be impossible, for it would be a process of referring experiences to a whole which we could never know as a whole, which in fact was the incomplete 'whole' of history, part of which is always in the future.

All of experience may not be before us, but *the whole of experience*, the whole which experience of any sort implies, can be. That whole is something which, in a sense, we construct; but, in another sense, it is both unmakeable and indestructible. The idea of *all of experience* is an idea which belongs to the world of phenomena; the idea of the *whole of* experience belongs to the world of concrete thinking. *All of experience* is a 'world' which is yet to be completed, a world whose meaning lies in the future and the past; *the whole of experience* is

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[3] For example, Hegel, in the *Encyclopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften*, attempts a survey of the whole of experience with reference to a unifying principle. Aristotle's complete works represent an attempt to cover all of human experience.

[4] Cp. Plato, *Theaetetus*.

simply the world of real things into which past and future do not enter.

That which really is, is; there never was a time when it did not exist, and the future can discover nothing new. Past and future, in fact, do not belong to the concrete world; they are abstractions. The concrete world knows only the category of *existence*; to see a thing concretely is to see it as it *is*. So then, the universe in relation to which things are to be seen as they really are, is one from which all the abstract notions of 'will be', 'shall be', and 'ought to be' have been expelled; it knows only that which really *is*.

7. How, then, shall we start to build up a concrete view of this kind? By what process do we come to see things as they really are, see them, that is, related in the only world of discourse which is a 'world', a 'whole', in the full sense? And, in particular, how are we to build up a concrete view of political life, of society? For concrete thinking about that particular experience we call social life, you see, is just simply seeing these experiences as they really are, seeing them related in the real world.

There are two pieces of advice which I can offer. If we want to see things as they really are we must (i) *Start* from where we are now, *start* from anywhere you like, start from any abstract notion, any isolated experience, you care to choose. But (ii), we must *move*. To remain content with seeing an experience as isolated, to remain content with mere unresolved plurality is, you see, not only to fail to understand things as they really are, but it is to fail to understand them in even the most abstract and most limited sense of understanding them. To understand things is to see them as parts of a unified world of discourse; to understand things is to *move* away from the mere plurality of our crudest and most abstract experience—mere sensation—towards some kind of unity.

The effort which is at the bottom of thinking of every kind is to see the many as a unity. In abstract thinking, the effort is to see the more abstract 'many' in terms of a less abstract, but nevertheless still abstract, 'one'. In concrete thinking, the effort is to see the abstract many in terms of the concrete, the real whole; to see the many as

they really are. So then; start from what experience or experiences you like, but if you are to accomplish anything you must move from plurality to unity. Philosophy is the attempt to find the real unity of human experience, or, in other words, to see human experience as it really is. Political philosophy is the attempt to find the real unity of political or social experience, of social life, or, in other words, to see society, political life as it really is. To discover the ultimate principle of sociality.[5]

The question is, the only question is, What are the *facts*? Not, What are the facts when understood as parts of this or that abstract world; but, What are the facts when fully understood, when understood as parts of the one real world, the universe. It is not, you see, that some things are just abstract, just unreal, just don't exist—that is nonsense. There is nothing which is wholly abstract; things are abstract only when seen in relation to this or that abstract 'world'. 'Everything is real, so long as we do not take it for what it is not.'[6]

We must not take the crude course of denying the existence of anything and everything which does not fit into our scheme of things; we say, on the contrary, that things are constantly seen abstractly, constantly mistaken, constantly misunderstood; the results of these mistakes, abstractions, and misunderstandings are things which do not exist and have not ever existed, things which are in no sense real; but, things which can be misunderstood can also be understood, facts that can be misinterpreted (that is, taken for what they are not) can be rightly interpreted, and the results of this right understanding and right interpretation are real things, things as they really are.

You see, there is no such thing as the bald 'fact' to which some people appeal; the 'fact' is its significance, the 'fact' is its meaning,

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[5] Cp J. McTaggart, *Studies in Hegelian Cosmology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1901). ['Hegel has defined for us an absolute and ultimate ideal, and this not as a vain aspiration, but as an end to which all reality is moving.', p. 193.]

[6] Bosanquet, *Logic*, i. 258.

and so *what* the 'fact' is, depends on *how* we look at it, whether or not we understand it.

The real facts of social life are not the apparent, isolated 'facts' which meet in our ordinary practical experience of social life; the real facts are these abstract facts of ordinary, abstract experience, transformed, seen as they really are and always have been. It is no *change* that is produced by this seeing things as they really are; it is simply recognizing reality, the reality which is always there, but is usually rejected in favour of some abstract 'fact', which, though useful, is yet false and unreal.

8. But to get back to political life in particular. How are we to construct a concrete view of society? Our first principle was that it does not matter where we start; all starting points are equally good for the search for the real thing, because 'everything is real so long as we do not take it for more than it is.'

Now the ordinary experience of society, the kind of experience from which it is useful to start because it is a kind we are brought up against every day, is one of plurality and contradiction. Plurality, because there are any number of things in our social experience which are either unrelated to one another or unsatisfactorily related. Contradiction, because not only are many experiences unrelated, but many are also contradictory.

This plurality is easy enough to resolve by placing the experiences within a scientific or historical world of discourse, but since these are abstract worlds, it will be only an abstract resolution of plurality, we achieve only an abstract unity. It is easy enough, also, to say, 'At any rate, practical life gives unity to this plurality; solvitur ambulando!' But this, too, is an abstract unity and not a finally real one. And the same is true of the contradictory experiences of social life. *Our* problem, you understand, is to see how this plurality can be resolved into a real unity, that is a unity which shows us the plurality as it really is.

For simple plurality, and *a fortiori*, simple contradiction, cannot be understood except in terms of some kind of unity. As I have said again and again, what we mean by understanding or experiencing a

thing is seeing it as possessing a place in a unified system of things. All understanding of real things, all knowledge, is in terms of a real world, a whole, a unity, a universe. To explain, to understand this plurality and contradiction of social life, then, we must see it in terms of the real universe, the concrete whole: and that is just the business of political philosophy.

9. I want now to give you some slight description of some of these pluralities and contradictions of our ordinary social experience. These, you see, cannot be 'facts', because they are things imperfectly understood, but we may call them, if you will, the data of a true political philosophy; they are our starting point.

10. The largest and most comprehensive of these contradictions is that described by the phrase, 'The State and the Individual'. A first glance at our social life and its organization cannot fail to give us some impression which, if it does not require for its description the phrase, 'The State *versus* the Individual', at least requires, 'The State and the Individual'. Everywhere we see on the one side a governmental organization, making and enforcing rules and regulations which on occasion will appear to be thoroughly in harmony with the needs and desires of the individual men and women who they affect, but in some cases will seem to conflict with those needs and desires; and on the other side, a series of individuals, each endowed with individual desires and purposes, sometimes assisted and sometimes hindered by this thing which most people agree to call the 'State'.

The juxtaposition or the contrast of, in this sense, the State and the Individual, is a matter of the commonest, everyday, practical experience. The eager collector of butterflies, conscious of nothing but his passion to secure a certain specimen, may find himself thwarted by the laws of trespass. The man who wishes to sell opium, thinking, perhaps, that opium is the door to a happy life, will find himself in prison. The playwright may find the production of his play forbidden. The householder who wishes to build a brick garage in his garden must first submit his plans to the district surveyor.

And the man who believes that all war is wrong, and the use of force a sin, may be deprived of liberty of speech and action, may even be forced to take part in that which is abhorrent to him.

The State and the Individual are, we are tempted to say, the fundamental 'facts' of political life; but the question is, Are they true 'facts', or is this phrase a misleading way of stating the real fact of political life? And our conclusion will be that, simply because we have here a theoretically unresolved contradiction, these are not the true 'facts'. We must look elsewhere.

This broad, inclusive contradiction of the State and the Individual has many narrower applications and more restricted instances. It is said, for example, that the main characteristic of political life is the distinction between the governors and the governed. Hume said it, and Professor Laski says the same thing: 'the modern state is clearly visible as a territorial society divided into government and subjects'. 'Whatever be the nature of political institutions, their central fact is always the legal duty of the many to obey the few, with the right of the few to exercise the power at their disposal to compel obedience.'[7]

Or again, there is the common distinction between the service of the State and the service of oneself or some other 'private individual'. Some people we speak of as being in the employment of the 'State', civil servants, postmen and soldiers; while others we regard as being employed by and employing private persons. And there is the case, which no book on casuistry fails to treat, of the man whose private desires and even duties conflict with his public obligations.

11. Another element in these general data of political philosophy is the obvious and insistent variety of desires and ambitions, purposes and occupations, of the individuals who make up our society. 'Anyone, indeed, who looks at the character of modern life would find its most distinguishing feature in the existence of a multiplicity of wills which have no common purposes which drive them to identity,' says Professor Laski,[8] and that is, of course, a matter of

[7] H. Laski, *Communism* (London: Williams & Norgate, Ltd, 1927), p. 124; *Authority in the Modern State*, p. 22.

[8] Laski, *A Grammar of Politics*, p. 32.

the commonest experience. 'What exists is an amazing welter of wills which press upon each other', says the same professor, and he continues with the statement that 'the starting-point of every political philosophy is the inexpugnable variety of human wills'.[9] At any rate, then, we *start* together, we start from the same point as our professor, and the only difficulty I have with his theory is that I am unable to discover that he ever gets any further than his starting point. Our two principles were, (i) to start from where we are, (ii) to move. Professor Laski adheres passionately to the former only of our principles.

12. The expression 'Rights and duties' indicates another of the juxtapositions of political life, and one which is equally a matter of common, practical experience. These stand over against each other, not as contradictory, but as, in a way, complementary. The whole of social life could be analysed into a series of rights and duties, and for the most part it would probably be possible to avoid what seem to be fundamental contradictions. Practical life, it is true, does present some apparently unresolvable contradictions in the world of rights and duties, but, for the most part, they are the extreme cases only.

13. The last of these juxtapositions and contradictions with which a first glance at our political life acquaints us, which I want to maintain, is that expressed in the phrase, 'Law and morality'. Here too is something which is a common experience. To conform to the law is not necessarily to have fulfilled our whole moral duty, to pursue our moral obligations may bring us into conflict with the law; that which is legal may, perhaps, not be moral (in our opinion), and that which is moral may turn out to be illegal in the opinion of the lawyers. Here is another of the common contradictions of practical political life with which our political philosophy must start.

14. Now, I have spent the greater part of this lecture in trying to show you that a description of anything, political life included, in terms of mere variety, mere juxtaposition of elements, mere

[9] op. cit., pp. 31, 34.

contradiction of characteristics, does not amount to a true description, is in no sense a true explanation. We know anything, we understand anything, only in so far as we see it as a unity, as a whole thing which can endow its elements with some common principle.

And since it is the object of political philosophy to understand political life, to discover the real facts, to find out what it really is, its first obligation is to give unity to variety, harmony to contradiction. If the wills of individual men in society are really 'inexpugnably various' then it is an admission that we do not and cannot ever understand them.[10]

To be merely various is to be wholly incomprehensible; it is only in so far as variety is seen to lose itself in some kind of unity, in so far as the many are seen as parts of the one, that we can be said, in any sense, to understand them. Political philosophy, then, may *start* with the merely various, the merely concurrent or contradictory, but if it were to remain there, to leave these conceptions unaltered , it would fail to be political philosophy in any intelligible sense, for it would fail to be a concrete description of political life. The problem, then, which political philosophy has to face is that of making intelligible an experience of political life which is fragmentary, contradictory, and, at first, unintelligible.

It must find, somehow, a resolution for these contradictory elements and forces, a unity for this crude variety. For crude variety and mere contradiction are not, and cannot be, 'facts', in the true sense of the word, because they are themselves self-contradictory and unintelligible. That is a 'fact' which can sustain itself, whose existence in this manner is not contradicted either by itself or by the other components of its world. And mere variety and simple contradiction must disappear unless we are to content ourselves with a philosophy which is unreasonable and a 'real' world which is unintelligible.

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[10] [Oakeshott cites Laski, *Studies in the Problem of Sovereignty*, p. 6, but this phrase does not occur there. He may have had in mind Laski, *A Grammar of Politics*, p. 31: see previous note.]

Philosophy Again

1. Social life comes before us in our practical experience as a collection of sometimes contradictory, and always ill-related, relations. It presents us with the phenomenon of 'a vast multitude owing allegiance to a comparatively small number of men'.[1] It is, for the most part, a world of hard contrasts, of rigid distinctions, and unresolved contradictions; and any social experience which does not come within this description is adequately represented by saying that it consists of related particulars or individuals whose relation leaves them still particular and still individual.

Social life consists in relations, of one sort or another, between the individual units of society, and relations between these units and the whole society itself. The State and the Individual are separate things, somehow related, but how related we do not know, except that the individual seems to be somehow subordinate to the State, somehow owing its obedience, though often this obedience be either ignorant or unwilling or both. The relations between the individuals who compose a society are sometimes explained by saying that they are ruled by a system of rights and duties. But this is an explanation of one plurality in terms of another, and so no explanation at all. To speak of rights and duties—of either or both—is to use the vocabulary of practical life, it is to admit plurality and to resolve it only for practical purposes, into a practical unity and not a real unity.

Somehow we are conscious that we have not understood our political life, have not seen it as it really is, until these rights and duties, claims and counter-claims, appear, not as ultimate and unresolvable, but as the spectra into which the prism of practical thinking splits up the single ray which is social life, life in society as a whole. Rights and duties do not explain themselves and so are not terms in which anything else can be adequately explained; we must find the 'whole' to which they both belong. And again, in our practical experience law and morality as often as not stand over

[1] Laski, *A Grammar of Politics*, p. 21.

against one another, and, at any rate, are *never* the same thing. They must be related somehow, but how? They must belong to a single universe, for otherwise they are condemned to live in permanent isolation, condemned that is to be permanently unintelligible. These, then, are some simple examples of the kind of data from which any attempt to explain social life must start.[2] We are given, so to speak, the isolated parts of a jigsaw puzzle, and our business is to find the picture which they make.

2. There are, I think, three main ways in which the various efforts to explain this phenomenon of social life have found expression.

(i) By the assertion of ultimate and permanently unresolvable plurality. The data, these isolated elements of social life, belong to no unity; their essence is their isolation. In the terms of our metaphor, this amounts to the assertion that the parts of the jigsaw puzzle make up no picture, their whole essence lies in the view of them we get as we see them jumbled up in the box. That this is an altogether inadequate explanation of political life I need hardly say again. Explanation *means* to find unity, and the only unity which this explanation finds is in the fact that after all these parts are in a box which contain them all. If this were the only explanation we required, then it is safe to say that we can achieve it without any very arduous process of thinking. This is the pluralist explanation.

(ii) The second explanation offered us may be called the utilitarian explanation, though it is much older than what we usually call utilitarianism. It consists in explanation in terms of compromise.[3] The individual elements of society and the society itself are permanently separate and often antagonistic, but a unity may be found, amid this warring chaos, in terms of the greatest

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[2] But cp. *The Trial and Death of Socrates*, pp. 109, 124. Practical life itself does, in a measure, resolve these contradictions. [It is difficult to be sure which passages Oakeshott had in mind here as it is unclear which edition he is citing.]

[3] Cp. I. Kant, *The Philosophy of Law An Exposition of the Fundamental Principles of Jurisprudence as the Science of Right*, tr. W. Hastie (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1887). [Oakeshott also noted 'Hume' and 'Bentham'.]

good of the greatest number. Individuals are separate and isolated in society, but social life is a unified life because it is governed by, not the warring and contradictory claims of every individual, but the single and unified claim of the majority. This is a unity created by the suppression of those elements which make for disunity.

I need hardly argue that this gives us no satisfactory unity, no intelligible explanation, for that is clear enough. It is an abstract and false unity, it is akin to the unity of scientific thinking which is achieved by the elimination of all disagreeable elements. It is, in fact, no unity at all, and we have got no further than the assertion of ultimate plurality could take us. The old, and well worn, theory of the Social Contract gave to social life a fictitious unity of this kind.

(iii) The third way of explaining social life is what I take to be the characteristically philosophical way. It asserts that this explanation can only be satisfactorily achieved by means of, or in terms of, a unity which rejects no real element and leaves no real element isolated; a unity which accomplishes the resolution of *all* the contradictions and isolations of our ordinary practical experience of social life. And this can be achieved only by concrete thinking, by an explanation in terms of the one real whole, the universe. If this could be achieved it would neither be abstract nor inadequate; in such a picture all the real elements of social life would be seen as they really are, that is, in terms of the real whole. And it is this attempt which I wish to explain a little further.

3. In a true philosophy of politics there would be two chapters, entitled, respectively, the individual, and the state; and a political philosophy would fall short of truth which did not show, also, that these two were somehow really one. For until it has shown that it has not achieved concreteness: it is still in the valley of abstraction. I do not propose to give you now these two chapters as I conceive they should be written, that would be too large and difficult an undertaking for me, and, in any case, it is my aim to get you to think them out for yourselves. But I want to spend a little while in showing you the kind of way it might be done.

4. Let us start with the individual. It is no exaggeration to say that the problem of individuality in all its forms is the most fundamental problem of philosophy, is, in fact, the only problem in philosophy; so you must not expect me to give you a complete answer. All I can give you is a few hints to show you how important and how difficult the subject is.[4]

What is individuality? We might do worse in trying to answer the question than to take the hint which the word itself gives. An 'individual' is something which is indivisible, which cannot be divided.[5] That seems to give some clue.[6] The individuality of a thing is just the amount of the thing which makes one—from which nothing can be taken away without the unity ceasing, and to which nothing can be added in such a way that it is absorbed and not merely attached.

Our ordinary way of attacking the question would be, I suppose, to assume that anything which showed a physical unity of this sort was an individual in the true sense, but that way lies only a morass. However, let us see the kind of morass in which it is likely to land us. An individual thing is, then, anything which seems to stand out from other things—its environment—with a certain observable degree of self-subsistence and self-containedness.

On the outside we place this 'thing' and over against it, defining its limits—which are usually physical limits—is, its environment. Now, in order that this may be a coherent answer to the question, What is an individual thing? you can see that we must be able to decide, more or less unambiguously, exactly where the 'thing'

[4] See Bosanquet, *The Principle of Individuality and Value*; Bosanquet, *Logic*, i. 24 ['it is never true in the plainest sense that a thing or matter of fact has its essence in mere distinction from another'], i. 138 ['we must take the individual unity to be a matter of degree'], i. 147 ['If we are told to count even all the "things" in a room, we shall find ourselves obliged to ask what is to be reckoned as a "thing".'], and index; and Bosanquet, *Philosophical Theory of the State*, p. 95.

[5] Cp. 'Identity'.

[6] See thesis; quotation from Locke. [Possibly a reference to the discussion at pp. 99–100 above.]

ends and the 'environment' begins. And yet, even in our everyday experience, the difference between the individual thing and its environment does not stand out with the degree of clearness we should desire.

A plant, for example, we might say, the individual thing, is something which can demonstrate its physical self-subsistence by not suffering any change by being removed from one environment to another. An individual thing, you remember, we said was that which is not divisible without ceasing to be what it is. But, in the case of the plant, how far does that which is removable in it depend, for the continuance of an *identical* existence, upon what we have called its environment? Even if it were possible to remove the plant, without destroying its individuality, from its particular situation in the earth and the atmosphere, it is still true that the plant, to be what it is, depends upon access to some soil and some air.

So, as I say, if we start with the idea that the individual is that which stands out from its environment, is independent of its environment, we soon discover that a good many things we have hitherto regarded as 'individual' are not really so. Indeed, in so far as the 'thing' really depends upon its environment it cannot be distinguished from its environment without destroying it, without elevating it into a lifeless abstraction. And if that is so, we must find some other way of defining individuality than by saying that it is the physically independent.

So we come back to the idea that the individual is that which cannot be divided, that which is a whole. If a certain physical object is really quite inseparable from its environment, then *it* is not an individual; the real individual is the whole made up of this abstract 'thing' and its equally abstract 'environment'. But that is just a hint.

5. And what happens when we transfer ourselves from the world of things to the world of people, the social or political world. All the same difficulties are there—and most of them are even more difficult than before. For the relation of so-called 'individual persons' to their environment—an environment of other so-called individuals and of merely physical objects—is infinitely more close

and more subtle. Is the ordinary, physically distinguishable body any more independent of its so-called environment than the plant? We should suppose that he would be a good deal *less* independent.

So, either we must say that by 'individual' we mean simply that which is physically distinguishable, or we must come to the conclusion that the individual is really that which is indivisible, that which is a whole, and so quite indistinguishable from a great deal of what we commonly call its environment.[7] And unless individual is to mean simply that which is abstract, that which is a part and has no real self-existence, I think we must choose the latter alternative. 'The "individual" man, the man into whose essence his community with others does not enter, who does not include relation to others in his very being, is … a fiction',[8] is a pure and complete abstraction. The individual apart from the community has only a pale abstract existence; he is not real, for he is not really individual.

We cannot go any further down that road just at present, but I hope I have given you a hint of the difficulty and importance of this subject which I have called one of the two chapters in any true political philosophy. Individuality, in the abstract sense of apartness, isolation, that which is cut off and physically separable, has been the starting point of nearly all English political philosophy. A man's 'true self,' says Professor Laski, 'is the self that is isolated from his fellows,'[9] and he echoes the fundamental presupposition of nearly all English, and most continental, political philosophy.

But to start with this supposition, and to retain it unchanged and unmodified is, I believe, to start with an error and gradually elevate it into a falsehood. Whatever in the end turns out to be the true concrete view of individuality, this at least is false. This sentiment for isolated 'individuality' which was in the Lutheran Reformation a feeling has been elevated into a philosophy which has the distinction of being probably the most shallow ever invented by man. A 'great

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[7] The expression a 'fish out of water' meaning, 'a man out of his natural environment', an 'unnatural' man.

[8] Bradley, *Ethical Studies*, p. 152.

[9] Laski, *A Grammar of Politics*, p. 31.

individuality' is not a man who is most isolated from other men, possessing the smallest measure of the characteristics common to men and the civilization common to his society; but he is a man in whom we feel the universal humanity has reached a very high degree of development and differentiation, one who concentrates in himself a great deal of human nature, he is strong because he is susceptible and original because he is receptive. It is the eccentric who is commonplace because he is exclusive, and weak because forever afraid of being in debt to other men. That, if anything, I should have thought would lead us to a more concrete view of the human individual.

6. The second chapter, and the last, of a true political philosophy I have said would be called The State. Its aim is simply to answer the question, What is the State? Its aim is to give as concrete a view as it can of the State. But Political philosophy in seeking the concrete individual finds, I believe, the concrete state, and in seeking the concrete State finds the concrete individual. Now, we may start with whatever notion of the State we choose, we may start even with the absurdly limited and incoherent view that the state is the government, but in end we shall be led, I think, to the view that the State is the social whole, is concrete society. In the old theory, which started with this so-called 'individual', it was always supposed that the various individuals who formed a community of any sort were held together by a tie, and something that was no more than a tie.

For so long as you retain this idea of the individual there cannot be anything more than the loosest sort of tie to bind different individuals together, something more intimate would inevitable destroy the current notion of individuality. The State, then, was simply a collection of these isolated and independent 'individuals' held together by an external and voluntary tie, and held together, it was usually thought, for certain limited purposes only. That this could pose as an adequate description of a human society is only less amazing than that the corresponding theory of individuality could pose as an adequate description of human beings and their relations. The two, indeed, stood together, and they fall together.

I have already indicated what I take to be the meaning for philosophy of the word State. It is simply, and only, a suitable name for that which in political life is a whole, a concrete thing, an individual. And nothing is implied in it, initially, except that somehow, of some character, a *whole* exists; that is, that in political life there is a real thing. The quality, possessed by anything which would indicate that it is a 'state', is the quality of wholeness. The State is the social whole. If it could be shown that this whole is non-existent and a mere fiction, then it would have been demonstrated that the state was a mere word with no corresponding thing behind it.

But, so far, no-one has attempted to show that the State, in this sense, does not exist; all that the critics have succeeded in doing, or have attempted, is to show that this or that, which has been called a State, is not really a social whole at all. And this is very much what we should have expected, because, in the sense in which philosophy speaks, there *must* be a whole of some sort; because 'whole' simply means, that which really exists, simply means these isolated and contradictory experiences seen as a whole.

7. Now, arising out of this position, I think it would be better if philosophy gave up making such free use of the word 'state', and spoke of 'statehood' instead. For, as we have seen continually, 'wholeness' is very often a matter of degree; some things are more of a whole than others; and if we spoke of degrees of statehood or wholeness with regard to the various human associations, I think we should be saying something relevant. For example, an association of persons such as a university is clearly more of a whole, clearly embodies more nearly the whole life and interests of its members, than (say) a tennis club, which is an association of people *qua* tennis players and not *qua* people. And so on.

But when we come to speak of the State absolutely, we must mean an association of persons which not only includes *more* of the whole life and interests of those persons than any other association, but includes actually *the whole* life and interests of its members. And the two questions which demand an answer are, Is there such an

association as this? and, Which of the associations of our experience is it?

With regard to the first question, we may answer that, in the full sense, there must be an association of this sort. For what are the consequences of supposing it not to exist?

First, if it did not exist no association at all could exist, for, as I have said before, the part implies the whole, the incomplete stands upon that which is complete. And secondly, if the State, in this full sense, did not exist, then we should be abandoned upon the limitless sea of pluralities and contradictions which, not being able to explain themselves, and yet, which exist in some way, necessarily assume a whole in which they can live in harmony. Somehow, I will not say somewhere, but somehow, then, the State, in this sense exists, a whole which gives meaning to all our isolated experiences of society is a sine qua non of thought and life.

But the second question is more difficult to answer. Which of the associations we know is the State, is this whole which is required to explain and give meaning to our particular experiences? That it will necessarily be what is called The State in ordinary language or in the language of law, there is no reason for supposing. We might as well suppose, because landed property is called, in law, real property, that it is necessarily real in the full, concrete sense of the word. And yet, if we look closer, we shall find, I think, that the claim of the State, in ordinary language, to be the State of political philosophy, to be the social whole, is not altogether unjustified. What other association of our experience is more comprehensive, embodies more of the whole life and interests of its members? I do not mean just the government, but the whole organized life which we are accustomed to call comprehensively the State. I think that a very good case could be made out for this State of ordinary experience being the true state, but all the case could prove would be that this State was the most comprehensive single association we know, not that it was the absolute whole, the real, complete state. Obviously it is not that. All we can say of it is that it possesses a greater degree of statehood than any other single association we know.

8. But the philosophical view of the State does not stop there. The real state is the absolute whole, the whole which alone is really a whole, which we cannot find completely embodied in any one form of association. For it is not a particular association, but the principle which underlies and is implied by all associations, however limited their ends may be. The State, for philosophy, is not a thing in the phenomenal world, it is a principle which explains all phenomena, which explains what is isolated and contradictory.

In fact, the State is to the political philosopher what the universe is to philosophy in general, the necessary presupposition of all intelligible existence. Social life is inexplicable in terms of its mere plurality, nor does the idea of a compromise, a balance of forces, afford a true unity: there is no unity outside a whole which includes every part within it, a whole which does not deny contradiction and plurality, but which resolves them. The State is the whole which all social life presupposes.

9. Here are our two chapters, the Individual and the State. The individual we have found to be, not something which is isolated and different from anything else but something which is large enough to be indivisible, large enough to be an independent whole. The individual is not some centre cut off from experience, but grows with its experience, is, in fact, made up of its experiences. This was all suggested; it was too large a subject to go with fully. And our conclusion was, roughly that an individual thing, or individual person, requires much of what we call its environment.

That is to say, the difference between the individual and its environment is not always clear, and it is often quite clear that to take away its environment is to destroy the thing or to change it completely. The individual person, also, is not distinguishable from much that we call his 'society'; in fact, the only finally intelligible sense in which we can use the word individual is one which means a whole active experience and association. An individual is, in the end, all that he knows and meets, is a whole of experience, is that whole of him which can exist independently, because it is selfsupporting

and complete. Anything less than this is a mere abstraction. The only individual there can be is a whole.

But how does this differ from the whole which we have called the State? I do not think it differs at all; and that is what I mean when I say that until we have seen that these two chapters are really a single chapter we have not achieved a concrete view of society or of the individual. The State is the whole which all association presupposes, and the individual, in the end, cannot be defined as anything less than the whole to which he belongs, the whole which makes him what he is.

So the conflict between the State and the individual, which was real enough in common experience, real enough so long as we thought of the individual as some isolated abstraction and the State as a phenomenon in a phenomenal world, is resolved. When we discover what each really is, they are found to be the same thing. Social life, this political life which we have been in search of, turns out, when it is viewed concretely, not to be a matter of claims and counter-claims of individuals against each other, for the individuals who could live in a world of that sort would be mere abstractions.

Each claim is made, each obedience owed, each right justified by and in the whole, not between individuals, but between the individual and the State, the social whole. And, in the end, this is a claim made upon himself, a right demanded of himself, an obedience owed to himself. How is self-government possible? asked Rousseau. This is how it is possible, we answer; and I believe it to be substantially the same answer as he gave himself. It is because, in the end, the State is the only true individual which exists, and the individual the only State. What to an abstract thinking was continually a matter of conflict, what was a contrast between '*is*' and 'ought to be', is, in this concrete world, an harmonious existence, for the concrete world, being the whole, contains and resolves all conflicts and all isolations.

In an abstract way of putting things we say that the service of the state is a matter for civil servants, soldiers, and others employed directly by the government; but, when the 'State' means this whole

of political life, everything we do is done both for and by the state, and everything we suffer is suffered by and on account of the State. There can be no state education as contrasted with private education—all education is an education of the whole by the whole. We can no longer speak of the 'modern state' or the 'nation state', for that is to lapse at once into abstraction. And so on. If we could see this picture, this relation of the many and the one, of the whole and its parts, clearly, see it in every detail of its organization, and see also every implication it involves, we should have a true political philosophy, and until we see this we have nothing at all that can properly be called a political philosophy.

10. But what sort of a conclusion is this? Have you proved, you may ask, have you proved that this whole of social life is a really concrete whole, and if it is not, does it not imply that after all political philosophy is abstract thinking? Surely, in the end, the only true whole, and consequently the only true individual, is the universe, and you cannot pretend that this political whole is the universe? When Socrates wanted to express his conviction that the real individual could only be found in the real whole, he said, 'How do you conceive it possible to comprehend the nature of the soul without comprehending the nature of the universe?' It is not the social whole, but the universe which explains the individual; it is the universe with which concrete thought is concerned.

All this, I think, is true. Political philosophy in so far as it is political, in the end, fails to be true philosophy, fails to be concrete thinking. A complete political philosophy does not merely *involve* a complete philosophy in general, but *is* it. Philosophy has, for centuries, at the hands of men with abstract interests, suffered an unnatural division. But it cannot be divided up into these parts without easing to be concrete thought; ethics, metaphysics, logic, aesthetic, and politics are not parts of philosophy, because concrete thinking can have no parts. Philosophy is just concrete thinking, in the sense I have tried to explain, and in so far as it is *political* philosophy, in so far as it is willing to view things merely in relation to this social whole, it fails to be philosophy.

If you once embark on a philosophical study you cannot stop short of the whole thing: it has no departments. Philosophy is the concrete view of anything: and to see any one thing concretely it is necessary to see it in relation to the whole, that is, it is necessary to see everything else concretely. In the end, then, political philosophy is abstract thinking also, unless it is willing to go beyond itself, and become philosophy itself. And this, indeed, is what it has done wherever it has achieved real concreteness—in those rare and splendid moments in Plato's *Republic*, in Aristotle's *Ethics*, in Spinoza's *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, in Rousseau's *Contrat social*, and in Hegel's *Philosophie des Rechts*.

11. Philosophy, then, is concrete thinking, and consequently can have no departments; it is all or nothing. It has nothing whatever to do with science, history, or practical thinking. They are not the basis for any relevant criticism of a philosophical idea, and it, in turn, can have nothing to say to the conclusions of any kind of abstract thinking so long as it does not overstep its proper function and limits. Unlike many kinds of abstract thinking, in philosophy there are no authorities. '[For] metaphysics a principle, if it is to stand at all, must stand absolutely by itself,' dependent upon its own inherent reasonableness and consistency.[10]

Philosophy, clearly, does not and should not satisfy the whole of our desires and necessities. It is not the whole of life; and the concrete truth, which is its object, has very little, if anything at all, to do with life as we live it. Philosophy satisfies, that is, only the theoretic side of our nature, the side which throws aside questions of what ought to be and what has been and what will be simply to ask the question, what is? In other words, philosophy seeks the facts and nothing else whatever, and seeks them simply and only for the sake of finding them, and not of doing anything with them when they are found.

Philosophy does not seek the isolated facts of ordinary experience and abstract thinking, these are its data, and what it seeks are the

[10] Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, p. 120. [Cp. p. 101 n. 11, above]. Cf. *Essays on Truth and Reality*, p. 235.

concrete facts, the whole fact. For, as Bosanquet says, 'if anything at all has been made clear in the history of philosophy, it is surely that as we get to truth … we get away from [isolated] facts',[11] because they are not really facts at all, they have no meaning and consequently no existence. Philosophy can recognize nothing in the shape of a self-sufficient element or autonomous detail, that which alone is self-sufficient, that which alone explains itself, alone is real, is the whole. The truth is the whole. Philosophy has been well defined as 'finding bad reasons for what we believe by instinct'.[12] The important thing is that they should be *reasons*. Philosophy is simply the effort to have done with all abstractions and think concretely.

12. Before I end, I feel that I ought to say a word as to the use of philosophy in general and political philosophy in particular. In the ordinary sense, of course, it has no use at all, and to try and 'make use' of the conclusions of concrete things is to misuse them. They are not intended as a guide to life. Philosophy, as we have seen, needs for its pursuit neither profound knowledge of human nature nor the superficial acquaintance with things in general which is called 'knowledge of the world'. It is wholly independent of experience, in the ordinary sense, and nearly independent of book learning—they are no authorities in the ordinary sense. And, consequently, utility does not belong to philosophy.

Philosophy, Hume thought, was just a way of looking at things, a way we describe by saying that it looks at the whole truth of things. It is not an attitude of mind which we can always preserve, we cannot live permanently in that kind of atmosphere, but along with it goes a certain detachment, a certain lack of prejudice, a certain sense that all is not as easy as it seems and that nothing is really commonplace, and it is in this attitude, which belongs incidentally rather than necessarily to philosophy, that its chief use in life is to

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[11] Bosanquet, *Logic*, ii. 320.

[12] Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, p. xiv: 'Metaphysics is the finding of bad reasons for what we believe upon instinct, but to find these reasons is no less an instinct.'

be found. And, as far as political philosophy is concerned, I think this idea of the individual and of the State, the idea of the Social whole which we get in a true political philosophy, though it has no great value for practical political life, does give us a heightened sense of what it means to live in a society which cannot be counted altogether valueless.

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